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**Resistances in Bodily Form:**  
Post-1945 American Poetry and D.H. Lawrence

**Joseph R. Shafer**

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My thanks goes to Daniel Katz, my supervisor. I hope others find such guidance.

## **Declaration**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not previously been submitted for a degree at another institution.

## Abstract

This project alters the field of American Studies and Modern American Poetry. For after Cold War critics of America's Myth and Symbol School had employed D.H. Lawrence for an American exceptionalism, and after Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) had disapproved of Lawrence, the British author has been marginalised by scholars of American Studies and American Poetry. As a result, Lawrence's foundational role within America's countercultural poetry has been overlooked. Robert Duncan, who led the Berkeley & San Francisco Renaissance, has repeatedly testified that Lawrence remains the 'hidden integer' within the poetics of Donald Allen's groundbreaking anthology, *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960*. This research project asks: how does the transatlantic reception of Lawrence change the tradition of post-1945 American poetry? Within the so-called 'New American Poetry,' queer, black, feminist, and non-academic voices emerged, yet their poetry defined itself by resisting the structures of 'closed-verse' as well. The break into 'open form' had renounced much of the American poetry tradition, especially the intellectualism of high-modernists. In this generational gap, Lawrence's banned writing on the sexual, sensual and political body becomes privileged by countercultural poets, and integrated into open-forms of poetry. Therefore this project also asks: how does the physical body, as found in Lawrence, surface within the disparate literary forms of leading poets and their coteries? Each chapter introduces an undocumented reception of Lawrence within a social network of post-WWII poets and follows a poet's reading of Lawrence's bodily form throughout their formative years. Featured poets include Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and Sylvia Plath. The poets are chosen for their reliance upon Lawrence, but each poet also represents a wider social scene. As a new transatlantic and American literary history is charted, new readings emerge in new American poets and in Lawrence alike. In reinterpreting well-known and unknown poems through this lens, a new hermeneutic is explored wherein a bodily form surfaces within the spatial formations working upon the page.

Above all, we cannot afford not to live in the present. Unless our philosophy hears the cock crow in every barn-yard within our horizon, it is belated.

~Thoreau, *Walking*

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing

~Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'

No way seeing is-ness  
no way saying it-ness  
except resistance.

~DuPlessis, 'Draft 39: Split'

These essays for the shape and current of them. Not yet extravagant; not yet care-free so that all cares could exfoliate into an orchestration. But even shame, and, of course, the fact that one does marvelously but not very well at writing.

~Duncan, 'From a Notebook'

## Introduction

I know, Columbia, dear Libertas, you'll take my posy and put your carrot aside for a minute, and smile, and say: 'I'm sure, Mr Lawrence, it's a *long* time since I had such a perfectly beautiful bunch of ideas brought me.' And I shall blush and look sheepish and say: 'So glad you think so. I believe you'll find they'll keep fresh quite a long time, if you put them in water.' Whereupon you, Columbia, with real American gallantry: 'Oh, they'll keep for *ever*, Mr Lawrence. They *couldn't* be so cruel as to go and die, such perfectly lovely-coloured ideas. Lovely! Thank you ever, ever so much.'

~ Epilogue, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*

D.H. Lawrence has stood at the door of American poetry criticism, acknowledged but not adopted, and yet he seems more inclined to just keep knocking. His attraction for America remained tangled up in his repudiation of it, and without irony his work is kept at a safe distance in American poetry criticism, where he resides in occasional listings of those who have influenced certain aspects of modern or new American literature. In regards to 'new American poetry,' these seldom references to Lawrence should no longer ignore their histories. Before Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder read Lawrence together at Big Sur, and before Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes would celebrate and fight each other through Lawrence, there was already a Lawrentian foundation laid for America's countercultural poetics. In the mid-1940s, Kenneth Rexroth, William Everson and Robert Duncan joined in edifying San Francisco through readings of Lawrence. At a time when Rexroth stood as the West Coast doyen, he had been writing poetry and essays about Lawrence, was lecturing on Lawrence, and edited Lawrence's *Selected Poems* (1947). On the east coast, Charles Olson, in his own right, would write several essays on Lawrence, finding him to be the exceptional 'post-modern' poet during the '40s and early '50s. In 1950 Olson had also sought to edit Lawrence's *Selected Poems*, which Olson described as a 'labor of love'. While intimately sharing Lawrence with Frances Boldereff and Robert Creeley during these formative years, Olson repeatedly confirmed Creeley's statement

that 'DHL is worth 1000 [Ezra] Pounds'.<sup>1</sup> Duncan would in fact identify himself, Olson, Creeley, and Levertov through their relation to Lawrence, for 'Charles and I' were 'post-Poundians' who shared a similar Lawrence, while Creeley and Levertov each had 'another one'.<sup>2</sup> Creeley too began emulating Lawrence in his own poetry and prose, placing Lawrence as the epigraph for his *Collected Poems: 1945-1975*,<sup>3</sup> and later stating, 'D.H. Lawrence was the hero of these years'.<sup>4</sup> Aware of Lawrence's significance in such circles, but also aware of criticism's continuous marginalisation of Lawrence, Duncan observed that Lawrence remains the 'hidden integer' within Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960*.<sup>5</sup> But even this tallying of references is another example of evading well-mapped histories and developed readings of underground Lawrentian poetics. For within the interconnected web of post-1945 American poetry, Lawrence is closely held as a most familiar foreigner from the previous generation, whose early death allowed younger poets to situate him within the arising gaps of America's high-modernists and among themselves. Once admitted, Lawrence offers a pivotal point for the open forms of new American poetry.

Unearthing such a history nevertheless comes with an academic burden. If indeed an unknown Lawrence proves to be fundamental for poets whose poetics are by now well-established, then I already run the risk of contesting long assumed dicta in American poetry scholarship. For example, Charles Olson is traditionally introduced as constituting a 'new American poetry' out of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. And though Christopher Beach argued that Olson contested Pound more than he admired him,<sup>6</sup> Beach does so when reaffirming Olson's Poundian heritage. But Olson wrote: '[I'm] so sick of

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Olson, *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Volume 3* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Duncan, 'The Spectrum Interviews, 1982, Part I: "Out from Under 'Olson's Push,'" in *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews With Robert Duncan, 1960-1985*, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Creeley, *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975, Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Adamson, 'Robert Creeley: 1926-2005,' Jacket2 (2004).  
<http://jacketmagazine.com/26/adam-creeley.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Duncan, 'Sagetrieb Interview (with Michael Andre Bernstein and Burton Hatlen, 1985), In an Order of Orders,' in *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews With Robert Duncan, 1960-1985*, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 413.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Beach, *The ABC of Influence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 111-112.



this biz of comparison—all over the place, it is 'like Pound' for me—Christ, it makes me sick: none of them honestly know that two men stand forth out of the half century: he and DHL'.<sup>7</sup> At times Olson would even deploy Lawrence as an antithesis to Pound, as we'll see. The burden therefore lies not so much in developing and expanding the existing criticism on Olson, but in exposing an affair quite defiant of certain norms. Such could be said about each of the poets in this dissertation. Moreover, the same problem results when confronting Lawrence scholarship, for the counter-cultural poets of (post)modern American poetry insisted upon reading Lawrence in ways not entirely familiar to Lawrence scholarship. To appease such concerns, two systematic approaches were considered when undertaking this project: either to relate familiar concepts within Lawrence criticism to these later poets, thereby saving myself from one camp, or vice versa—taking a familiar concept in new American poetry and tying it to Lawrence. But out of a certain respect for the significance that lies within this critical gap, I have chosen to do neither. If new readings of the poets and Lawrence arise simultaneously, I hope that such routes may speak all the more to the complexity of the subject.

The reach of Lawrence's work in post-1945 America would indeed exceed the boundaries of what would later be considered 'counter-cultural' or 'postmodern' poetry, but his hand in the radical 'open form' of 'new' American poetry is worth exploring. The label 'new American poetry' connotes those countercultural poets who were generally born after 1910 (a generation after the modernists), who published from the late-1940s on through the 1960s. The term 'new American poetry' more specifically refers to the movement represented by Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* (1960),<sup>8</sup> but the term has also come to include comparable poets of that generation who were not included in Allen's early collection. Though Allen calls this new wave as the 'third-generation' of American poets, his collection ran parallel to a more conventional form of

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, vol 8, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Donald Allen, *The New American Poetry: 1945-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). In *The New American Poetry* poets were organized by region: the New York School (Ashbery, O'Hara, Schuyler, Guest), the Bay (Spicer, Blaser, Brother Antonius, Helen Adam, McLure), Black Mountain (Olson, Creeley, Duncan, Levertov), the Beats (Kerouac, Ginsberg, Corso, Orlovsky), and others, such as Paul Blackburn and Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka).

verse still dominant in American poetry (associated with New Criticism).<sup>9</sup> This more traditional or academic vein of poetry can be seen in Donald Hall's 1957 collection, *New Poets of England and America*, which did not include any of Allen's poets. Hall's academic background, at Philips Exeter, Harvard and Oxford, looked towards a different scene than Allen's, for Allen had translated Japanese when serving in World War II and published marginal poets in small presses upon his return. After Allen's *The New American Poetry*, however, Hall quickly responded, and in 1962 Hall came out with another collection, *Contemporary American Poetry*, which would integrate eight of Allen's poets, and, due to its two-year lag, Hall was also able to include poets who had successfully published during those intervening years ('60-'62), poets like Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath. The 'contemporary' categorisation of Hall's collection allowed a mixture of the traditional with the 'new,' but by sewing a new patch onto old clothing, a tear in American poetry criticism could not help but grow.

This new wave of poetry appeared innovative particularly when facing certain modernist and American traditions. The paradox of newness is thus its dependence upon tradition, and its tendency to change under different traditions. The re-anthologizing of new American poetry through the 1990s also continued to play what Perloff called the 'where is?' game, racing to include poets who were previously omitted, but three characteristics spoiled the original sense of newness: the apparent belatedness, the loss of new or small press publications, and the retrospective assignment of such newness to traditional modernist camps.<sup>10</sup> Allen's *The New American Poetry* saw its tradition out of 'Williams and Pound,' and Allen and Butterick's *The Postmoderns* had again introduced the lineage of Emerson, Whitman, Pound and Williams. Similarly, Eliot Weinberger's 1993 anthology, *American Poetry Since 1950*, credited the 'Pound-H.D.-Williams' triad. The reaffirmation of such modernist traditions caused Perloff to propose that if Gertrude Stein had been introduced as the precursor for Weinberger's new American poetry then a different set of poets and poetics could have fallen into view. As it is, the belated return to new American poetry and its dependence upon canonical modernists goes on arresting

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Majorie Perloff, 'Whose New American Poetry? Anthologizing in the Nineties'. <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/anth.html>.

the very newness of its poetry. Perloff checks off the more widely considered but still recurrent influences for new American poetry anthologies during the '90s: 'Eliot and Pound, Stevens and Williams, Moore and H.D., Gertrude Stein and Hart Crane? Add to these the English poet Auden, the French Valéry and Reverdy, Apollinaire and Cendrars, the German Rilke, Trakl, and Brecht, the Spanish Lorca, and Argentinian Neruda, and you have a pretty fixed notion of what Modernism-in-Poetry would look like'.<sup>11</sup> In turn, one receives a familiar notion of what new American poetry looks like as well. The countercultural poetics of a 'new American poetry' after 1945 nevertheless occupy a particular wave in history, and, like its open verse, its contributors and histories remain fluid under alternative traditions. Such an alternative is D.H. Lawrence.

This project exists because of the intentional or unintentional marginalisation of Lawrence in American Poetry criticism, and though one can only speculate about the rationale behind instances of neglect, some factors require far less speculation. Lawrence was an anti-academic who intentionally resisted falling into national traditions, and he therefore fell out of certain canons. But Lawrence is also less known as a poet than a prose writer, rendering Lawrence not only alien to American literature but a British novelist whose fiction is all the more difficult to place in American verse.

Perhaps a more evident reason for Lawrence's relative absence in American Poetry criticism is the notoriety he received by leading feminist critics in the second-half of the twentieth century; a period in Lawrence criticism that Lawrentians must move on from but cannot ignore. This wound, I believe, has still scarred over poetics that could otherwise arise, especially since such treatment subsequently renders Lawrence a seemingly unnatural fit for the queer and feminist poetics of the '50s and '60s. For example, Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985)<sup>12</sup> had utilised Lawrence's 'Whitman'

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See also Lisa Sewell's 'Introduction' to *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics* (2007), where Sewell notes Perloff's own fixation on past modernisms, which nullifies the newness of experimental poetry. Perloff's introduction to *Twenty-First-Century Modernism: The 'New' Poetics* (2001), observes Sewell, 'convincingly argues that contemporary innovative and experimental poetry is indebted to early Modernist writings at the beginning of the twentieth century; thus it is perhaps less innovative than has been claimed'. p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 215.

essays to exemplify a male homosociality that negates and oppresses women.<sup>13</sup> When reading the 'Whitman' essay, Sedgwick reduces Lawrence's argument to an essentialist position, which Sedgwick sees as unable to permit the complexities of (homo)sexuality, and yet Sedgwick seems to overlook Lawrence's wider critique of Whitman's own idealism. Lawrence's 'Whitman,' from early drafts to final, turns admiration into a physical antagonism against Whitman in order to enact, locate and feel a bodily difference which Democracy must come into contact with. In certain ways, Lawrence charges Whitman with what Sedgwick holds against Lawrence, which is a failure to uphold the complexities of difference. The homosocial tendencies that do loom in Lawrence nevertheless implicate an underlying homosexuality and a certain relation to woman—two provocations that new American poets certainly echoed at times.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) had also lambasted Lawrence for his 'phallic pride,' as Lawrence's male characters require Woman to succumb to the phallus and take on the role of lack. Beauvoir writes, 'his life as a male has to be wholly the expression of his virility, which posits and requires woman in its immediacy; she is thus neither diversion nor prey, she is not an object confronting a subject but a pole necessary for the existence of the pole of the opposite sign'.<sup>14</sup> The phallic is indeed around every corner, and, as David Holbrook elaborates in *Where D.H. Lawrence Was Wrong About Women*, the novel *Women in Love* is problematic, as Birkin requires Ursula for his own confirmation of wholeness. Lawrence writes, 'She was only too ready to knock her head on the ground before a man. But this was only when she was so certain of her man, that she could worship him as a woman worships her own infant, with a worship of perfect possession'.<sup>15</sup> Lawrence's symbolic phallus can literally kill women, as Kate Millet argued in *Sexual Politics* (1970), where Millet scorns Lawrence's short-story 'The Woman Who Rode Away' for depicting woman's self-sacrifice for a nativistic priapism.<sup>16</sup> But the woman had ridden away from her husband and her confined domesticity, like so

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<sup>13</sup> The homoeroticism in Lawrence's *Women in Love*, between Gerald and Birkin, could be a case in point, as it ends with Gerald nearly strangling Gudrun to death and Birkin unable to experience marriage with Ursula without Gerald as his companion.

<sup>14</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 2010), p. 229.

<sup>15</sup> David Holbrook, *Where D.H. Lawrence Was Wrong About Women* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1992), p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 238.

many of Lawrence's female protagonists, who were explicitly acknowledging their position between two deaths, and, as protagonists, his women explicitly address and further expose the very violence of patriarchal logic. Lee Jenkins reminds us that Millet had ironically chosen a text that was collaboratively edited, if not co-authored, by Mabel Dodge Luhan, Catherine Carswell, Dorothy Brett, and Frieda Lawrence.<sup>17</sup> Lawrence's provocative attempts to speak as woman, to speak to woman, and feature woman as his protagonists, has continually left his prejudices bear, but his taunting sparks debates which have more or less moved on without him.

Lee Jenkins's recent book, *The American Lawrence*, explicitly confronts looming prejudices against Lawrence within American Studies, and intercedes by situating Lawrence as himself an author of American literature. In attempting to answer John Muthyala's question in *Reworlding America*, 'Can non-Americans write American literature?', Jenkins succinctly replies, 'I read D. H. Lawrence as a non-American who, in one period of his career at least, wrote American literature'.<sup>18</sup> To introduce such a notion, however, Jenkins must first call attention to the internal controversies within American Studies itself, which have ignored certain aspects of Lawrence's work as a result. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* was advantageous for the Myth and Symbol School and its Cold War critics, such as Leslie Fielder, Leo Marx and Henry Nash Smith, which now ties Lawrence's *Studies* to the pillars of American exceptionalism. Since *Studies* was employed by such 'soldier-critics,' as Donald Pease calls them, Lawrence has become 'a whipping boy for the purported crimes and misdemeanors of the myth and symbolists'.<sup>19</sup>

But while American scholars began shying away from Lawrence in the post-WWII, Civil Rights and Cold War era, American artists were picking him up. Jenkins's main method for presenting Lawrence as a writer of American literature is to contextualise Lawrence's American coteries. Focusing on milieus such as the Alfred Stieglitz circle in New York City and Lawrence's communal ranch in Taos, Jenkins makes it convenient to shelve Lawrence's poetry about America's flora and fauna in

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<sup>17</sup> Lee M. Jenkins, *The American Lawrence* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *The American Lawrence*, p. 12.

*Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) alongside Williams's *Spring and All*, Stevens's *Harmonium*, and E.E. Cummings's *Tulips and Chimneys*, each published that same year. The strength of Jenkins's argument is her narrow scope, which focuses on Lawrence's collaboration with American writers in America, and therefore *The American Lawrence* does not cover Lawrence's relations with expatriates or with Americans of another generation, though Lawrence's relations with American expatriates would certainly expand his role in American poetry. Pound had admired Lawrence's British dialect-poems, but the two were at odds in innumerable ways, not the least because of their shared affection for H.D. As early as 1938, Duncan would attempt to reconcile the differences between Pound and Lawrence, and became intrigued by the poetry H.D. wrote during her Lawrentian phase.<sup>20</sup> Yet it was William Carlos Williams, Duncan observed, who always kept a mindful relation to Lawrence. Before long, new poets could see that certain gaps in American verse could be filled through Lawrence. He had passed through and contested the Georgians, Imagists, Futurists, Occultists, Lyricists, Apocalyptists, and others, reiterating his own morphing, sexual, demonic, and countercultural forms of poetry. Born with Pound in 1885, but having died of tuberculosis in 1930, the following generation of American poets had the responsibility of deciding Lawrence's place.

To describe Lawrence as 'practically an American writer' as Olson had is to initially situate him among and against other American writers.<sup>21</sup> Apart from *The American Lawrence* there have been few studies that put Lawrence in dialogue with America's mid-20th century novelists and poets. In an article entitled, 'D.H. Lawrence and Black Writers' (1990), Leo Hamalian briefly introduces how Lawrence made an impression on a range of black writers, such as Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.<sup>22</sup> Hamalian later produced another survey of

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Duncan, *The H.D. Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, vol 7, p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Hamalian, 'D.H. Lawrence and Black Writers,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 16:4 (Spring, 1990). pp. 579-596. For example, it was not so much the Parisian writers that caught McKay's eye when abroad, as Wayne Cooper observes in *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance*, but 'D.H. Lawrence, with whom McKay felt a psychic kinship and for whom he had a profound and lasting admiration' (208). McKay did think that Joyce's *Ulysses* was 'a bigger book than any one of Lawrence's,' and yet in McKay's 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way From Home*, McKay would write, 'I thought D.H. Lawrence was more modern than James Joyce,' since,

the receptions of Lawrence in *D.H. Lawrence and Nine Women* (1996), where Hamalian runs through Lawrentian resonances in Katherine Mansfield, H.D., Rebecca West, Meridel Le Sueur, Anaïs Nin, Kay Boyle, Margaret Drabble, Joyce Carol Oates, and Sylvia Plath.<sup>23</sup> *Nine Women* touches on the diverse manners in which Lawrence was appreciated and received, but, like Hamalian's essay on 'Black Writers,' *Nine Women* is also an abridged study (sometimes giving each author only a few pages, and often only quoting lines from letters), and therefore Hamalian's surveys introduce Lawrence's broad reach while soliciting future work.

Lawrence does appear in 'new American poetry' criticism relatively early, in Ekbert Faas's 1974 article, 'Charles Olson and D.H. Lawrence: Aesthetics of the 'Primitive Abstract,' where Faas compares Olson's *Mayan Letters* (1953) to Lawrence's *Etruscan Places* (1932). Olson, like Lawrence, saw modern people alienated by the mechanical structures of language (e.g. syntax and grammar), and they both appealed to ancient cultures in order to reintroduce a pre-Socratic symbolism with Heraclitean flow: a natural 'parataxis' of symbols, 'a process of physio-linguistic empathy rather than of intellectual organization'.<sup>24</sup> Lawrence's hand in Olson's *Mayan Letters* reemerges again in criticism in 1990, in Alan Golding's essay 'D.H. Lawrence in Recent American Poetry,' published in Michael Squires's *The Challenge of D.H. Lawrence* (1990). In addition to Hamalian, Golding provides another survey of Lawrentian resonances in mid-20th century American poetry. The essay opens by recalling R.P. Blackmur's cold critique of

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in Lawrence, 'I found confusion—all of the ferment and turmoil, the hesitation and hate and alarm, the sexual ineptitude and the incertitude of this age, and the psychic and romantic groping for a way out'. Hamalian postulates that Lawrence's alienation from English culture and Lawrence's struggling cosmopolitanism resonated with McKay, whose own experiences of France in *Banjo* and fear of hostility at home in *Banana Bottom* speak to Lawrence's particular angst about the modern violence within the 'spirit of place'. Hamalian also reveals that it was Lawrence's short stories, particularly 'The Rocking Horse Winner,' that encouraged Langston Hughes to write his own short stories: 'If D.H. Lawrence can write such psychologically powerful accounts of folks in England, that send shivers up and down my spine, maybe I could write stories like his about folks in America'. Jean Toomer would also share Lawrence's love of Mexico and native peoples, and Richard Wright cherished Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, since they shared a sense of the maternal foundations to 'home'. Hamalian also refers to Tony Tanner's criticism, which relates Ellison's *The Invisible Man* to Lawrence's poetic manifesto, where the artist must poke through the covering of one's umbrella for a momentary vision of chaos.

<sup>23</sup> Leo Hamalian, *D.H. Lawrence and Nine Women* (London: Associated University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Ekbert Faas, 'Charles Olson and D.H. Lawrence: Aesthetics of the 'Primitive Abstract,' *Boundary2*, 2:1 (1974), p. 121.

Lawrence in 'D.H. Lawrence and Expressive Form,' and Golding uses Blackmur's essay to reintroduce the vital paradox of Lawrence's technique: that while Lawrence may have ostensibly lacked the technical skill to develop 'an external form' in his poetry, Lawrence's 'increasing disregard of the control of rationally conceived form' is a gateway into the 'open form' of new American poets.<sup>25</sup> Golding surveys new American poetry icons, pointing at how certain aspects of Lawrence's poetics could figure,<sup>26</sup> but Golding is mostly attracted to the evidence once again given by Olson's admission of Lawrence's *Etruscan Places*, since Olson wrote: 'his ETRURIA (my, SUMERIA)'.<sup>27</sup> As Faas postulated, Golding sees Lawrence's emotional symbolism and expressive open-form as a segue into Olson's allegorical symbolism and open-verse, yet Golding's essay surveys a great range of poets and confines the link to Olson as reduced to Lawrence's *Etruscan Places* and Olson's *Mayan Letters*: two texts not radically known for their poetics.

This project aims to introduce and develop Lawrentian poetics within the work of Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Sylvia Plath, in order to introduce a wider history and closer readings of specific literary forms. The thesis narrows in on such a wide scope by working through three overlapping frames: by privileging the poets's readings of Lawrence and their Lawrentian poetic over and often against presiding Lawrence criticism; by focusing on the topic of the body and a bodily poetic; and by ultimately reading such poetics of the body as an aesthetic and materialising form upon the page or book. What I call 'bodily form' is a process whereby the physical forms of space resist certain linguistic or historical structurations or modes of production. As the dissertation unfolds, Lawrence can be seen in-forming the sensual space upon Olson's page, guiding the poem's linguistic body. Lawrence will also open up Duncan's hieroglyphic use of

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<sup>25</sup> Alan Golding, 'D.H. Lawrence in Recent American Poetry,' in *The Challenge of D.H. Lawrence* ed. by Michael Squires (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 203.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Golding's essay also outlines numerous 'recent American poets' who share general Lawrentian qualities. Theodore Roethke's 'Some Remarks about Rhythm' looks to Lawrence's sense of rhythm and adapts it into his own shortening and lengthening of lines. Roethke's essay quotes from Lawrence's famous letter to Edward Marsh, 'It all depends on the pause—the natural pause, the natural *lingering* of the voice according to the feeling—it is the hidden *emotional* pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form.' Golding then moves onto other likenesses in Edward Dorn's satiric epigrams in *Hello, La Jolla* and *Yellow Lola* and Creeley's *Pieces*, both of which seem to mimic Lawrence's 'little bunch of fragments' in *Pansies*. But it is Lawrence's work on native and ancient cultures that Golding once more juxtaposes with Robert Bly and Gary Snyder's Eastern studies, or Jerome Rothenberg's ethno-poetics.

<sup>27</sup> *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley*, vol 3, p. 64.



space, as if within the realm of touch. And Lawrence will support Plath's literalising body, as it crawls into that spatial cavity between lines.

Olson, Duncan and Plath have been chosen because they often represent dissimilar traditions in new American poetry (a masculinist projection, a queer mythology, and a confessional feminism), and while Lawrence complicates and alters these trajectories, Olson, Duncan and Plath also acknowledge and exhibit a prolonged reliance upon Lawrence's writing. In each chapter I attempt to divulge the poet's dependences upon Lawrence but will also track the maturation of their readings, over years or decades. While there are numerous new American poets who could still fit the criteria of this study, these three poets can also represent and introduce the wider Lawrentian circles in which they participated: Olson and Duncan in various schools on both coasts, and Plath in Massachusetts and England.

But unlike Beach's *ABC of Influence*, I will not devote this Introduction to a theory of 'influence'. I do not use the term 'influence' in this project except when quoting or referring to another critic's own approach. My methodology is more comparative. I begin with the archive, historicising and contextualising the poet's letters, essays and lectures, where these poets address key poetics in Lawrence that commonly relate to the body. I then compare their readings of the body in Lawrence to the work being referred to in Lawrence; allowing my own interpretation to bridge the gap between the poet's Lawrentian criticism and Lawrence's writing. I next relate the interpretation of Lawrence's work back to the poet's explicated poetic, in order to inform a particular reading of the poet's bodily poetic. I conclude each section by reading a poem most relevant to the context and content of their Lawrentian poetic, which will fall under a certain bodily form as developed throughout the chapter. This approach, which avoids the problematic term 'influence' while accounting for many of its characteristics, is well suited for these particular poets, for Beach similarly stipulated in his 'Introduction' that the confessional and derivative poetics of Robert Duncan (or even Olson and Plath) is a technique that immediately undermines Bloom's reading of the anxiety of influence, which had interpreted influence as the ephebe's repressed agon with 'the poet within a poet,' an indirect, unconscious and masked relationship with the poet's precursor. In our poets there is often an excess of language that is directly referencing precursors such as

Lawrence. And yet, no matter how biographical my historicisation of our poets and their reinterpretations of Lawrence may appear, in my readings of their poetry I refrain from calling the poem's semi-autobiographical narrator or protagonist or 'I-voice' by the author's name, and will simply call the figure or voice 'the poet'. This methodology does not avoid 'influence' as such, but rather attempts to remain more faithful to the agency of the letter rather than to the subject underneath.

In giving birth to the poets' readings of Lawrence, which come at the timely death of the author, I preemptively accommodate readings of the poet or poem's working body as a process of language, discourse and form, rather than that of a fixed identity, an author, or an object of history. The first frame here, of reading the poet's poetic over autobiographical moorings, already supports a reading of the poet's 'body' as her externalising, materialising, and literalising Other with-in or outside of signification. The second frame, which focuses upon the topic of sensuality and corporeality, becomes particularly prevalent in readings of Lawrence, since Lawrence's work is often concerned or even preoccupied with the politics of one's sexual, sensual, physical and gendered body, so much so that Lawrence's life was plagued by obscenity charges; his life-work commonly bound by criticism of Oedipal fantasies in *Sons and Lovers*; his mission routinely rooted to the sex of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; his philosophy simplistically reduced to the 'blood-consciousness' of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. In Lawrence, a study of the author quickly becomes a study of the poet's relation to the body. More interestingly, Lawrence's writings about the body were also inseparable from his literary form.

Amit Chaudhuri has argued that the 'bad poet' in Lawrence nevertheless proffers 'an alternative aesthetic' through a process of redrafting, repeating, and patching poems together, exemplifying a tactile montage of intertextuality;<sup>28</sup> and yet the surface of Lawrence's textuality is also teasing out a moving form that is like a body, that is, out from the chain of virtual signifiers. Not unlike Golding's intimation that Lawrence's non-intellectual versification had welcomed subsequent practices of 'open form,' so too do I initially recognise that Lawrence's poetic form had harboured a bodily movement, where pulsating 'plasma' and sexual differences revolt against structured verse, free verse, or

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<sup>28</sup> Amit Chaudhuri, *D.H. Lawrence and 'Difference'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 113.

historical empiricism.<sup>29</sup> In *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence: Essays in Language, Representation and Sexuality* (2001), Paul Poplawski introduces the primacy of Lawrence's resistant, literal body: 'Lawrence's crusade to "right the body" and to acknowledge the body's true "rights" after what he saw as centuries of repressive religious, moral, and legal "prohibition" has been perhaps the single most familiar focus of popular and critical responses to his work since the very beginning'.<sup>30</sup> More specifically, Poplawski and the contributors of the collection introduce Lawrence's main concern as being how to bring the *real* body into or as discourse itself. Lydia Blanchard's 1985 article, 'Lawrence, Foucault, and the Language of Sexuality,' had already observed that 'Lawrence was certainly interested in the full conscious realisation of sex, but that interest was, for him as for Foucault, part of a broader concern with what it means to bring sexuality into discourse, part of a broader interest in the relation between language, sexuality, power, and knowledge'.<sup>31</sup> The ability to bring the body into the world is for Lawrence an 'instantiation of reality itself, an inscription (or reinscription) of the body onto/into the world,' where 'art [is] defining itself against the material body of the world while simultaneously bringing into being the materiality of that world through and with the body (of art)'.<sup>32</sup> Poplawski concludes: 'Lawrence moves from a practically oriented writing about the body designed to right the body, to a more theoretically nuanced writing of the body designed to write the body into real being/being real: a writing, that is, that sees life and art in the sort of symbiotic relationship'.<sup>33</sup> Stefania Michelucci's essay in the collection, 'D.H. Lawrence's Representation of the Body and the Visual Arts',<sup>34</sup> revisits Lawrence's theories of ancient art (e.g. Etruscan) to uncover a bodily art which would, in Lawrence's day, resist the mechanical discourse and ideality of modernity. Michelucci's essay has been recently summarised in Abbie Garrington's *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (2013), where Lawrence proposes a hieroglyphic experience of perception, in order to subvert the mechanical

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<sup>29</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Poplawski. *Writing the Body in D.H. Lawrence: Essays in Language, Representation and Sexuality* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. xiii.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. xii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

vision of the Kodak camera, as Michelucci also argued. For Lawrence, 'the Kodak is doubly damned,' writes Garrington, 'since it not only reflects the faults within the human vision, but also teaches human eyes to operate as if there were a mere apparatus'.<sup>35</sup> Lawrence combats modernity with 'the sense of touch' found in Egyptian and Etruscan visual art, because theirs was a corporal vision of tactile surfaces. Lawrence writes:

That again is one of the charms of Etruscan paintings: they really have the sense of touch; the people and the creatures are all really in touch. It is one of the rarest qualities, in life as well as in art. There is plenty of pawing and laying hold, but no real touch. In pictures especially, the people may be in contact, embracing or laying hands on one another. But there is no soft flow of touch. The touch does not come from the middle of the human being. It is merely a contact of surfaces.<sup>36</sup>

Navigating a tomb by way of its art, Lawrence felt that 'to see darkly and fumblingly is, however counter-intuitively, to see clearly'.<sup>37</sup> It is not only the effacement of mechanical reproduction and artificial representation that Lawrence found so vital, but the bodily perception of hieroglyphic and tangible surfaces. In this light, open-forms of post-modern American poetry can also be read counter-intuitively through Lawrence's aesthetic.

Theories concerning both the sensible body and an open form therefore bear similarities which I hope to magnify and rework. 'Open form' verse remains contingent to language and the production of language, yet it simultaneously resists the structurations of language, like the structures of closed-verse or even presiding open-verse poetics.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2013), p. 156.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Closed-verse is an ostensibly easier form to define, as its characteristics are often quantifiable (e.g. meter, line, stanza, devices, like alliteration) or generic (drama, lyric, narrative, prose), but 'open-verse' has opened up the very concept of 'form.' Definitions of 'open form' already signal this resistance to conceptual formation. Free verse or *vers libre* could be seen as a subsequent and linear reaction against closed verse, as it loosened its quantifiable structures while holding onto a concrete form, one often still holding stanzas against the margin, for example. The historical trajectory of closed-verse and free-verse is linear because it tends to build upon, relate to, and resist previous forms within a coherent lineage. In regards to open-verse and open-form poetics,

Similarly, the body has been theorised as that which also maintains a contingent relation to language, even in the body's inscription into thought. The body's dueling support *and* opposition to language can render a suspension and resistance against linguistic structuration, symbolisation and signification, like open-form. Therefore, my titular term 'bodily form' does not seek to present nor represent the real body, but to explore and tease out a structure that is bodily through the use of literary form, that is, through a spatial form and not just language. Both the real human body and the page's bodily form use physical and sensual space (either upon the page or in the world) as a material means of engaging and changing the materialisation and production of signification, as these chapters will introduce.

My theorisation builds off of Jacques Lacan's own readings of 'resistance' as a textual form. When reading 'resistance' in Freud's writing, Lacan spins Freud's previous definition of 'resistance,' which had previously defined 'resistance' as anything that interrupts the cure of analysis (the cure being, for Freud, the very dissolution of resistance).<sup>39</sup> Lacan, on the other hand, promotes 'resistance' as a practice that shall incessantly read the material interruption of discursive structuration, a disruption that is itself a material sign, but the materiality is a resistant gap-as-sign that ought to be encouraged, not cured. 'Resistance,' Lacan claimed, is 'that *which suspends/destroys/interrupts/the continuity*' of the work of the talking cure.<sup>40</sup> By analysing Freud's 'papers on technique,' Lacan not only redefines Freud's analysis of 'resistance' but he analyses Freud's own resistance in Freud's writing. What is more paramount in Lacan's

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however, form takes a more horizontal or diagonal axis, as each poet or poem often resists all other definitions of form, even the poet's. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines 'open form' as that which 'appeals to a higher authority than that of poetic trads., including trads. of free verse, in order to render "openness" somehow necessary and thus meet one criterion of verse. *Open* both describes improvisational forms and appropriates the formal revolution of free verse for nonformal purposes, authorizing such forms by invoking larger "freedoms"'. p. 976. An inaugural range of freeing manifestoes regarding new, open form poetry can be seen at the tail end of Allen's *The New American Poetry* and his edited collection with Warren Tallman, *The Poetics of the New American Poetry* (1973). While form may generally appear as that which is contingent to language, as that which governs the borders of signification, or as that which embodies the poem, open-form poets and poems may individually or incessantly render new concepts of 'form'.

<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 517. Freud wrote that 'whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance'. p. 517.

<sup>40</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Freud's Papers on Technique: Book I* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 34.

introduction to 'resistance' as a mode of analysis is that Lacan does not merely read the analysand's resistance (and therefore Lacan is not even reading 'Freud'), but Lacan is instead reading the *reader's* resistance through the disruptions in the speaking text. Lacan is reading the analyst's resistance, and therefore his own. The silent analyst who listens appears as the cause for the speaking subject's resistance. Thus Lacan concludes that 'resistance [is] on the side of the analyst'.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, Lacan also repositions the reader as the analyst. The reader/analyst views her own resistance being worked out or reflected, and in this case the reader's (Lacan's) resistance is being literalised in the material disruptions of the text. Thus Lacan offers a hermeneutic or aesthetic for a textual (material) resistance as well.<sup>42</sup> Such 'resistance' is at the heart of this project, not solely because the 'countercultural' poets discussed here confronted oppressive and normative politics and poetics, but because their attunement to a bodily poetic emerges in its suspect relation to language. Lawrence's own campaign, to shock modernity with an awareness of the body, was a textual practice, and in many ways the open-form of certain new American poets can be read as the radicalisation of bodily form.<sup>43</sup> Each chapter will

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<sup>41</sup> Jacques-Alain Miller, 'An Introduction to Seminars I and II: Lacan's Orientation Prior to 1953. *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, ed. by Bruce Fink (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 30. In 'Introduction to Seminars I and II,' Miller writes, 'Lacan affirms that the fundamental resistance in analysis is the analyst's, due to the fact that the analyst places himself in a dual relationship with his patient. Thus Lacan's famous adage that the *only* resistance in analysis is the analyst's'.

<sup>42</sup> I must add, that by the term 'aesthetic' I do not refer to the classical sense, but in Rancière's sense, when 'meaning' is not derived from an object but when an aesthetic experience is comprised of a fragmentation or a distribution of sensible material, whereby a subject is an open-ended process of 'making sense'. See Rancière, or, for this specific language, Rancière's conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy. See 'Rancière and Metaphysics (Continued): A Dialogue, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Rancière', trans Steven Corcoran. *Rancière Now*, ed. by Oliver Davis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 187-201.

<sup>43</sup> Criticism of new American poetry, particularly regarding the Language poets, can still carry a proclivity for linguistic signification when tending to form, where language is positive even when virtual or sounding, and space or page is often negative. In Charles Bernstein's edited collection of essays, *The Politics of Poetic Form*, Bernstein introduces a return to the political ramifications of poetic form, which the contributing poets, such as Jerome Rothenberg, Ron Silliman, Susan Howe and Nathaniel Mackey, attest to, but it is a form still contained within the Word. Here Jerome Rothenberg introduces the political context for an ethnopoetics and appeals to Dadaism's reliance upon language to usurp its structuration, quoting from Hugo Ball: 'A line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to language, to get rid of language itself. I want the word where it ends and begins. Dada is the heart of words.' Ball's 'sound poetry,' and the resonances of jazz within new American poetry, as in the Beats, Baraka, or Creeley's maxim that 'Writing is the same as music. It's in how you phrase it, how you hold back the note, bend it,

introduce how the poet's body becomes sexual, sensual and political, yet such context primarily appears in the spatial formations working and disrupting the text upon the page.

The first chapter on Charles Olson introduces three consecutive phases of his formative poetics: from 1944 to 1948, from 1948 to 1950, and from 1950 to 1952. Such a delineation not only distinguishes various developments in Olson's quickly changing poetic (stages that are too often reduced to a singular poetic), but such a timeline also highlights Olson's maturing reliance upon Lawrence, which appears monumental throughout Olson's foundational years as a poet. Exposing a new pillar of thought for a figure such as Olson has wider implications, as Olson's essay 'Projective Verse' (1950) was a manifesto for *The New American Poetry*, and Olson was arguably the leading figure for the Black Mountain School.<sup>44</sup> The historical influence of Olson's poetic, however, as found in 'Projective Verse' or *The Maximus Poems*, has been negatively assessed, as both egoic and phallocentric. 'Projective Verse' has been defined by the author's 'breath,' and although such breath would open up closed forms of verse, the author's centrality, from which his breath extends, only became more discredited by Olson's epic male-protagonists (i.e. Maximus), who, like Olson, enter a spatial frontier through a phallic or cratylic language. Therefore, by studying Olson and devoting my first chapter to him—an extended chapter at that—I worryingly step into a controversial field all the more fraught due to his pairing with Lawrence. But such concerns are revitalising. Besides trying to show the extent to which Lawrence remained critical for this iconic poet of New American poetry, this first chapter also heads straight into the wind by stripping the agency of Olson's phallic discourse through a Lawrentian 'body of

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shape it, then release it,' rely on the material signifier to disrupt signification, like the '=' in 'L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E,' rather than space. The material support here is in the discursive sound of silence above or outside the text. The 'color' of poetry—in sound, resonance, plosiveness, liquidity or breathiness—is nevertheless extracted from the linguistic content, while the aesthetic of bodily form becomes something absent or other to linguistic signs. Rothenberg and Bernstein point to the developing 'aesthetic' of the page in a certain relation to and among the linguistic—the verbal aspect of the work in contrast to the visual,' writes Rothenberg, but here I posit the visual space and interruptions as visual, and a vision contingent to an agency not unlike the resistance of the body.

<sup>44</sup> Olson served as the rector of Black Mountain College in its last years and culmination in '56, where he taught beside such teachers as Duncan, Creeley, Edward Dahlberg, William de Kooning, John Cage, and Joseph and Annie Albers, while students attended such as Joel Oppenheimer, Cy Twombly, Ed Dorn, Jonathan Williams and John Wieners.

space'. The signification of bodily form and of a body of space, for Lawrence and for our poets, is indeed correlative to a politics of sexual difference.

Criticism on Lawrence and Olson will often point to (or dance around) phallogentric language. Michael Davidson's *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* puts Olson at the forefront of the West's masculinist verse: 'poetry has often been the site of alternative—often perverse—gender positions, nowhere more so than during the repressive 1950s,' as 'poetry is also the site where those gender positions are created, from Aristotle's validation of the epic as the poetry of heroic males to the medieval *sirventes*'s equation of his poem to the female body to Poe's belief that the ideal lyric subject is the death of a beautiful woman to Charles Olson's phallogentric projective verse'.<sup>45</sup> Charles Bernstein's essay 'Undone Business' gives a concise account of Olson's phallogentrism. Bernstein initially admires the grand gestures of Olson's magnum opus, *The Maximus Poems*, which are found in the 'spatial arrangement of the words' and the mantra, 'no meaning but in space,' writes Bernstein approvingly.<sup>46</sup> When entering space, Bernstein argues that Olson invents a prosthetic materiality 'on a physical page with printed marks,' as if they were an 'extension of the hand'.<sup>47</sup> Olson's discursive performance with 'words,' as if words were extended limbs, is also the signature of Olson's proprioceptive 'poetics of the body,' continues Bernstein. However, Olson's somatic assertions and his epic narrative are all 'undone business,' since Olson's body is reduced to the extended 'ink' and its symbolic 'act,' which are but phallic stamps upon a feminised empty field.<sup>48</sup> Bernstein claims that the potentialities of Olson's spatial structuring in *Maximus* are undermined by its linguistic dominance and machismo: an 'Arete' wherein the 'image is of the man of action ("my balls as rich as Buddha's") sitting *in* (and acting *on*) the female "field" (where "field" is also an image of the page)'.<sup>49</sup> If we read Olson in this light (a light in which Olson asked to be read at times), where his historic language is slapped upon an empty field, then the radicalness of Olson's cratylic

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Davidson's *Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Bernstein, 'Undone Business', *Content's Dreams: Essays, 1975-1984* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 322.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 326.



language, which Carla Billitteri has recently studied, and Olson's Deleuzian dialectic of figure-ground, which Miriam Nichols has explored, remain tainted by a discursive field, that is, if its masculinity is left untouched.<sup>50</sup>

If phallic signs are planted in a field of negativity, the potential use of both the body and space becomes restricted and contained within language—a fleshly imposition upon a negative space. Without a sense of physical contact between word and space, and without a physical space for the letter to move about, criticism has negated much of what Olson would call a body. Readings often stress Olson's linguistic negativity regarding space, as the contemporary American poet and novelist Ben Lerner stated in a recent interview: 'You mention *The Maximus Poems*, and certainly white space is a – maybe the – foundational poetic strategy for figuring what can only be represented negatively'.<sup>51</sup> Reitha Pattison has also confirmed recently, in *Contemporary Olson*, that Olson's space is but a 'Void' of empty air.<sup>52</sup> Such spatial negativity has obscured the proposed potentialities with Olson's conceptualisation of 'Space' in his seminal work, *Call Me Ishmael*. As a consequence, the rapidly changing poetics of space in Olson's oeuvre are limited by a field of negativity. But if space's negativity can find a physical presence, one which works upon the text, then the sexual and political potentialities of Olson's space can open up as well.

My first chapter, entitled 'The Sensible Body of Charles Olson's Textual Space,' begins by utilising Olson's admiration of Merleau-Ponty's 'body of space' in order to introduce Olson's 'prospective' readings of Lawrence. Turning from the dualistic subject-object phenomenology of Husserl, who introduced a perception of the body into a phenomenology that still kept an 'abyss of meaning' between consciousness and reality, Merleau-Ponty finds that consciousness and reality occupy the same space.<sup>53</sup> For

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<sup>50</sup> Miriam Nichols, *Radical Affections: Essays on the Poetics of Outside* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010).

Carla Billitteri, *Language and the Renewal of Society in Walt Whitman, Laura (Riding) Jackson, and Charles Olson: The American Cratylus* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> See Daniel Katz's 'I did not walk here all the way from prose': Ben Lerner's virtual poetics', and Daniel Katz's, 'From Olson's breath to Spicer's gait: spacing, pacing, phonemes' in *Contemporary Olson*, discussed in section two of my Olson chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Reitha Pattison, 'Empty Air': Charles Olson's cosmology,' *Contemporary Olson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 52-63.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), p. 209.

Merleau-Ponty, the body's active touching of space, and the body's being touched by space, creates an intermediary realm between subject-object, and between objects in general. Such an embodied space forms an 'openness in being,' between the sensor and sensible, writes Alphonso Lingis, which 'occurs in the form of a world, that is, a field, a topography'.<sup>54</sup> For 'if the openness in being is a horizon-structure and not the production of void, then the seer and the visible need no longer be ontological opposites; the horizon includes the seer, and the world remains horizon because "he who sees is of it and is in it"'.<sup>55</sup> The prospective vision of Merleau-Ponty is thus a bodily perception of one's own being in the world: an experience *not* of a body *in* space (occupying an empty space) but a 'body of space'. As the chapter develops, I will compare Merleau-Ponty's body-subject to Olson's form with greater frequency, and yet, despite such affinities, Olson's topography is something quite different from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. While the viewing subject remains the absent artist for Merleau-Ponty (e.g. Cezanne, Matisse, Nizan), who stands outside and creates the artwork, Olson's bodily form literalises a sensible body working within the textual space upon the page. As a result, Olson's poetic can introduce an aesthetic or hermeneutical path for this thesis and elsewhere.

In regards to textual space, ignoring Lawrence in Olson can, on the one hand, further evade Olson's masculinist tendencies, and yet to neglect Lawrence is also to suppress a sensual form which may resist the authority of Olson's language, history or defined place. Merleau-Ponty's work on bodily space must also be rethought in regards to its masculine position. Collections such as Dorothea Olkowski's and Gail Weiss's *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* contain feminist and queer critics who have re-examined Merleau-Ponty, as Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler have: critics who feel that embodying the bodily space of sexual difference can open up the subject to a prepersonal reversibility of subject-positions.<sup>56</sup> Sonia Kruks suggests putting Merleau-Ponty's body of space to use: 'the sexism is not so constitutive of his theory as to preclude

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<sup>54</sup> Alphonso Lingis, 'Introduction,' *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. xliii.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xliii.

<sup>56</sup> Dorothea Olkowski's and Gail Weiss's *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2006). See also, Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, and Judith Butler, 'Sexual Difference as a Question of Ethics: Alterities of the Flesh in Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty'. See section 3 of Chapter I, and section 3 of Chapter II.

his work from being creatively taken up for feminist ends. On the contrary, I argue, his account of embodiment may accommodate, and indeed illuminate, gender (and other) differences that he does not dwell on himself.<sup>57</sup> Such a facilitation of Merleau-Ponty's bodily space can be afforded to his form because such bodily space is first manifest or immanent in Merleau-Ponty's work. For Olson, however, a sensual and mobile body (rather than merely a discursive one) must still be introduced to a tangible form of space upon the page.

In the first section of the chapter, Olson's seminal work on Melville, *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), is contextualised by locating a particular vision of space, wherein space is a physical entity. Olson's vision of a tangible space thus runs parallel to his more well-known studies of geographical space. Rather than simply envisioning a new history or geography of America's frontier, Olson began to employ the term 'prospective' in order to designate a vision of futurity that senses one's horizons. In *Ishmael* and corresponding essays, Olson's specific use of the 'prospective' will often refer to Lawrence as the paragon of such a vision. As far as Olson is concerned, Lawrence is able to perceive his bodily space when either historicising or when handling a text. Lawrence and Olson's shared readings of Melville provide an example. Though Lawrence's influence upon Olson's Melville studies has been suspected, here I will not only show Olson presenting Lawrence's work on Melville as unique, but I will undertake a comparative study between Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* and Olson's use of textual space in *Ishmael* in order to ground a sensible space which subsequent readings of Olson's poetry can develop.

In section two of the Olson chapter, I introduce Olson's obsession with Lawrence's poetry in 1950, when Olson was writing his own manifesto, 'Projective Verse' (1950). Besides Olson's vast writing on Lawrence within his letters at this time, I also introduce a 1950 essay by Olson that is alarmingly overlooked, entitled, 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind'. The essay is directly concerned with Lawrence's Christ-like ability to attend to sensuality rather than to objective knowledge. Such a context also puts Lawrence's similar manifestoes and poetry into dialogue with Olson's 1950 manifesto and related poetry. For example, 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing'

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

(1949) appears as a pastiche of Lawrence's *Pansies*. *Pansies* and 'The Story of an Olson' each explicate a concern for the poet's dying body, and they begin to revolutionise their physical and social bodies through the vital substance and 'fragrance' of 'space' itself. More interestingly, the spatial indentation in Lawrence's political poems about 'Space' further highlight the ways in which Olson's narrative form is also interacting and being reoriented by the space on the page.

In the last section, I review Olson's subsequent 1951 essay on Lawrence's novella *The Escaped Cock*. Olson's essay, 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real,' argues that poetry should attend less to objects, images, or even people and places and begin to focus on the realm of space which exists in between bodies. Olson's position 'between things' is then applied to his corresponding letters to Creeley, another Lawrentian, and their collaborative work, which is represented by the content and form of Olson's poem, 'To Gerhardt, There, Among Europe's Things of Which He Has Written US in His "Brief an Creeley und Olson"' (1951). Scholars continue to read the poem 'To Gerhardt' as legitimating Olson and Creeley's historicisation of America over Gerhardt's European history, thus showcasing Olson's fixation on the history of place and its linguistic heritage. However, within the context of Olson's writings on Lawrence at that time, the poem's content and form can be read as locating a sensible space between discourses. The poem's form will 'present' blocks of space as a gift to Gerhardt, which simultaneously presents a form that exists between historical time as well. By putting such poems into dialogue with Olson's readings of *The Escaped Cock*, the supposedly feminine space in Olson's historical discourse is continually observed as a revolutionising agent working materially.

The theoretical and hermeneutical groundwork laid out in the Olson chapter informs subsequent chapters. As in the Olson chapter, significant space is also given over to Duncan's reception of Lawrence, and for similar reasons. Apart from co-representing the Black Mountain School, Duncan was a cornerstone for the Berkeley and San Francisco Renaissance. Duncan's developing poetics are also distinguished over three distinct periods: his earliest poetry from 1935 to 1941, his return to the Bay from 1944 to 1947, and a series of poems from 1960-1968. Another similarity with the Olson chapter is that I again introduce a feminine body of resistance in Duncan, for while Olson's poetics

were considered masculinist, Duncan's poetry is most known for its male homosexuality. Thus Lawrence again provides a disturbing element, as Duncan's queer readings of Lawrence seem to operate around Lawrence's exploration and literalisation of the inherent conflicts within gender opposition and sexual difference. Queer theorists such as Judith Butler have found the relationality between gender and sexual difference to be an integral sign within the process of their own undoing, and Duncan's own reliance upon gender and masculine-feminine relations should be studied and interrogated in this way, in order to grasp the complexity and resistance within Duncan's queer form. Not only will Duncan read Lawrence as a queer poet, but Lawrence's literary performances of male-female genders and asymmetrical relations of sexual difference will appear critical to Duncan's poetic form.

Entitled 'To Touch Robert Duncan's Queer Undying,' this chapter begins by returning to Duncan's first poems, which undertake a strict poetics of resurrection, especially during his apprenticeship at *The Phoenix* magazine—a D.H. Lawrence Colony in Woodstock, New York. Duncan sought respite at *The Phoenix* from the traumatic break-up with his first homosexual partner and from the rise of World War II, both of which would constitute various 'wounds' in Duncan's identity. In these formative years, Duncan turns to what he terms a Lawrentian 'bisexual' 'fairy tale', where gender roles reconstruct a performative movement, in order to facilitate the resurrection narratives needed during such crises. One of the invaluable texts for Duncan, from his teenage years to his ongoing crises at *The Phoenix*, was Lawrence's *The Man Who Died*: a narrative continually disrupted and reoriented by the 'wounds' of 'the man who died' (Christ) and the sexual, resurrecting touch of his guide (Isis, or Sun). By tracking his readings of Lawrence and his Lawrentian coterie, the 'wounds' and the resurrecting touch of Duncan's formative fairy tale can be seen to have a strong foothold in Lawrence.

The second section follows Duncan back to Berkeley after *The Phoenix*. Both *The Phoenix* and Duncan's Berkeley circle share an explicit politic based upon Lawrence's apocalypticism. The various Lawrentian poetics in Duncan's Berkeley circle, and Duncan's explicit employment of a Lawrentian (bi-sexual) 'fairy tale' in 1944 to 1947, directly inform his debut collection, *Heavenly City, Earthly City* (1947). Since the collection and Duncan's coterie pushed Lawrence's apocalyptic vision, I read Lawrence's

last work, *Apocalypse*, along with Duncan's collection. Lawrence's life-long interest in the apocalypse was primarily interested in the sensual flesh and its consummation with the immediate touch of Sun and Moon, a communal touch which could erode violent notions of self and build strong individuals out of community. In Lawrence's apocalypticism, the polarised dynamics of sexual difference, Sun and Moon, Self and Other, each work upon the psyche and the body when forming what Lawrence called the 'microcosm'. Building off of previous works like *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *The Man Who Died*, Lawrence's *Apocalypse* outlines a body-politic wherein an individual and its (non)relation to community is ultimately mediated by the sensations of bodily flesh. In the queer movement of Duncan's *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, the polarised gendering and sexual differences are similarly transfixed as solar and lunar, self and other, internal and external. The fleshly microcosm of Duncan's *Heavenly City, Earthly City* can be read as working through such sexual or cosmic sensations of difference in order to embody a movement Duncan calls the 'undying song'.

The final section of this chapter focuses on Duncan's 1968 collection, *Bending the Bow*, and its central poem 'The Torso'. *Bending the Bow* is considered one of Duncan's most political collections, and 'The Torso,' besides being a celebrated poem, as exhibited in Paul Hoover's *Postmodern American Poetry* (2013),<sup>58</sup> is known as one of Duncan's groundbreaking 'homosexual' poems. However, Duncan's serialisation of the Edenic motif throughout his 1960s poetry also climaxes in 'The Torso,' yet the relationality and embodiment of sexual difference, so indicative of Lawrence and Duncan's Edenic scene, are overlooked. After introducing Duncan's own referrals to Lawrence when speaking about his collection, I introduce Duncan's readings of Lawrence's Eden poetry in 1960. The central motifs and tropes in Lawrence's Eden poems can then tease out recurring features in Duncan's Edenic poetry from 1960 to 1968. In the poems which Duncan cherishes, such as Lawrence's 'Paradise Re-entered,' 'New Heaven and Earth' and 'Elysium,' a new Edenic space is opened up and re-entered through a phenomenology of touch. Like Lawrence, Duncan will seek to 'storm the gates' of Eden, particularly in the war-torn and sexually repressed era of the '60s, in order to reclaim and occupy a queer

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Hoover, *Postmodern American Poetry: An Anthology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), p. 32.

space which political, religious, and psychoanalytic norms have regulated. Through Lawrence's own Edenic touch, an *umbilicus mundi* can be traced back to Eden through 'The Torso,' where a queer space is seized upon, and where new relations and identities can emerge and play out. More interestingly, 'The Torso's 'hieroglyphic' spacing and usurpatory use of phallic language illustrate a poetic form wherein the very grasping of the poem can itself re-present the undying, queer space of touch.

The final chapter on Plath, entitled "between those black lines of print": The Polarised Body in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*,' is able to build upon the concepts introduced thus far. The chapter's shorter length is therefore also a sign of its conclusive nature. Here Lawrence is again inserted as a provocative figure, as I introduce a feminine body through Lawrence, which appears in its struggle against the patriarchal dominance of masculine language and symbols. The strong wave of feminist scholarship on Plath, however, has often treated her affinity for Lawrence as an intimate rivalry, like that of Plath and Hughes. Yet by accounting for Plath's nearly life-long attachment to Lawrence's work, and her identification with his female protagonists, Plath's corpus and the graphic imagery of a woman's body therein can undertake a different form.

It is true that Plath is not normally aligned with 'new American poets,' such as Olson or Duncan, but her inclusion within the countercultural movement continues to be rethought. Labelled as a Confessional Poet, along with Anne Sexton and Robert Lowell, Plath's poetry and prose have continually resisted (in court as well as in her writing) definitions of being confessional. Not only does her fictitious poetry and prose present different, if not opposing, realities, her work is famous for its exploration of female sexuality within those different worlds. In Kathleen Margaret Lant's article, 'The Big Strip Tease: Female Bodies and Male Power in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath,' Lant argues that Plath should be compared with the Beats, because they share quasi-confessional narratives about sex and the politics of nakedness. Lant writes, 'Sylvia Plath was not a member of the exclusively masculine fellowship of the Beats, and her affiliation with the group we call "confessional poets" has come into question; however, in her work, her life, and her attitudes towards creativity, Plath bears many similarities to members of

both groups—especially with respect to self-disclosure'.<sup>59</sup> But while Lant highlights Plath's affinities with the Beats, Lant duly locates a crucial difference in Plath's work: 'But when [Plath's] use of the body, the metaphorical rendering of the female body specifically, is given close attention, we find that Plath inhabits a poetic universe far removed from that of Ginsberg or Whitman or Lowell. For her, the body stands not as a shimmering emblem of the soul's glory but seems, rather, an embarrassing reminder of the self's failures, an icon of the poet's vulnerability'.<sup>60</sup> Ginsberg's sexual body had also experienced persecution and vulnerability, and Whitman no doubt cries out, but there is an element of victimisation in Plath's feminised body that comes through all the more when considering her readings of Lawrence.

Plath's poetry and prose are known for their portrayals of a woman's sexual and maternal body, but that body is given a certain sexual, sensual and resistant form in Lawrence's writing. After initially introducing Plath's general affection for Lawrence, I review the ways in which Lawrence has been quieted in Plath criticism. Christina Britzolakis's *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (1999) frequently acknowledges Plath's allusions to Lawrence,<sup>61</sup> but Britzolakis focuses on Plath's theatrical and reflexive performances of language and tropes, in order to represent a restorative framework in her poetry, and Lawrence's masculine tropisms are used as objects to be overcome. Although Britzolakis often refers to Julia Kristeva's oeuvre, which relies upon the female body, I see Britzolakis's theatre of mourning more faithfully drawing from works such as Gillian Rose's *Mourning Becomes the Law* (1996) and Judith Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997).<sup>62</sup> Such theories of mourning lean towards a renewed life which discursive representation or resignification can enact, and cannot privilege the living or dying flesh which resists language—which is a core subject for Plath and Lawrence. More specifically, Plath's identification with how female desire is

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<sup>59</sup> Kathleen Margaret Lant, 'The Big Strip Tease: Female Bodies and Male Power in the Poetry of Sylvia Plath,' *Contemporary Literature*, 34:4 (Winter, 1993), 620-669, (622).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, pp. 624-625.

<sup>61</sup> Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

<sup>62</sup> Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).



portrayed in Lawrence further stresses how the physical experiences of such desire may become literal.

The chapter revolves around Plath's most early and enthusiastic reading of Lawrence, which applies his concept of 'polarisation,' as found in *Women in Love*. Though the 'polarisation' defined in *Women in Love* may be simplistically reduced to how male and female relationships should maintain a balance of mutual-independence, 'polarisation' is primarily a physical relation based upon physical forces. Since both *Women in Love*'s illustration and Plath's reading of 'polarisation' are defined from a feminine relationality to male dominance, the working of 'polarisation' appears as a condition formed by the female protagonist's splitting of affect, and her certain pleasure in a suffering body. In *Women in Love*, Lawrence's female protagonists are curiously attracted to their desire for men, marriage, upward mobility, and childbearing, but so too are they repelled by masculine discourse and forced domesticity. These competing forces and their balancing nevertheless appear governed by their sensation of such conflicts. The underlying and somewhat unspoken dynamic of woman's polarisation of affect in the novel is provoked and solicited by the novel's own dialogic form, rendering 'polarisation' not only a frame for reading the female body but a form surfacing in text. The novel's painful 'struggle for verbal consciousness' is an art form, as Lawrence stated in his 'Foreword' to *Women in Love*. Such a form can also be found in Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The recurring allusions to *Women in Love* within *The Bell Jar* invite comparisons between Plath's protagonist, Esther Greenwood, and Lawrence's, especially when woman's polarised flesh becomes increasingly pronounced when refusing her sexual desires. The female body in *The Bell Jar* can be read as situating itself in between the opposing objects of desire, as Esther repeatedly returns to physical crawl spaces when faced with opposing desires. She squeezes between mattresses and floorboards, just as she reiterates a desire to crawl in between pages or letters, or between the typed lines upon the page.

In all three chapters I intend to push the three frames introduced. A new history of post-1945 American poetry will be drawn by admitting and mapping certain receptions of Lawrence, which is taken as an aberrational tradition. The poetics developed by these authors will continually invoke a particular sense of a sexual and sensual body, one that has the capacity to resist political and poetic structures in the post-WWII era—not unlike

'open form' itself. By rethinking the body through the structure of literary form, this third frame concludes each section and chapter. An aesthetic or hermeneutic of a bodily form is reached at the end of each reading, where a physical form is found working in the space upon the page, against the text that this space also supports.

## Chapter I

### The Sensible Body of Charles Olson's Textual Space

But it is the least part of genius that attracts admiration.

~Melville, *Hawthorne and His Moses*

Love Lawrence, his verse, love Lawrence, him self, love Lawrence, who once lived, Love him who lived, Lawrence (reading Aldington, the dirty dirty dirty bastard, a book on, DHL<sup>63</sup>—just to find out more abt him, the beautiful, beautiful, beautiful man, beautiful Lawrence)

~ Olson to Boldereff, 1950

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Aldington, *Portrait of a Genius, But...* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950).

## The Prospective Body of Textual Space in *Call Me Ishmael*

1945-1948

Despite the occasional listings of D.H. Lawrence as an early Melville critic, or Ekbert Faas's and Alan Golding's brief comparison of the ancient symbolism shared between Olson's *Mayan Letters* and Lawrence's *Etruscan Places*, there is no fully developed criticism on Lawrence's presence in Olson's work. As such, the presiding criticism on Olson's use of Lawrence is heuristic in its allusions but misleading in its scope. In assuming and confining Lawrence as a harbinger for Olson's Melville studies, one may infer that Olson did not explicitly acknowledge Lawrence's readings of Melville, or consider them exceptional, which Olson did. And to restrict Olson's direct use of Lawrence to their shared historicisation of ancient culture also risks misrepresentation, since Olson primarily situated Lawrence as that which is against 'merely history,' to resist 'the historical dimension,' and to be 'against time'. In Olson's writings from the mid-1940s to the early-'50s, Lawrence appears to offer Olson a vision of history that is grounded in a sensual body, thus redirecting Olson's historical studies on the topic of geographical space to that of the body's sense of space. For Olson, 'space' is not just historiography or geography at bottom, as his seminal work *Call Me Ishmael* (1947) may imply, unless such a landscape is founded upon the body's physical experience of space, which Olson also argues throughout *Call Me Ishmael*. And it is indeed Lawrence's own readings of the body's relation to space in his 'Melville' essays that inform Olson's like criticism. To introduce Olson's early vision of history and its relation to bodily space, from 1944 to 1948, his central theses regarding the 'prospective poet' can be retraced, wherein Lawrence surfaces as the singular 'prospective' model for Olson. Early writings on Lawrence not only introduce an omitted history in Olson's work, but they also outline a missing body that resists the authority of historicism by opening up a physical and textual space for the burgeoning poet to explore.

A critical and recurring term for Olson, from 1944 until 1950, is the 'prospective' poet, which reappears as a defining trait for Olson's incipient poetics. In essays such as 'This Is Yeats Speaking' (1946), 'Man is Prospective' (1948), and 'Projective Verse' (1950), the 'prospective' bears a certain relation to history as it does to a bodily space, and each becomes increasingly illustrated in Olson's typographical use of the page's space as well. Though Olson's work remained concerned with historical or geographical measurements of 'space,' particularly in regards to Western expansionism, Olson's early prospection seeks to reinstate a bodily perception of history and space that interrupts quantifiable, objective, or linear narratives. In *Call Me Ishmael*, the 'prospective hero' is exemplified by Homer's Ulysses and Melville's Ahab, which, George Butterick notes, is the context from which Olson's later use of Maximus in *The Maximus Poems* (1956) would spring. However it is literalised objects such as Ahab that introduce Olson's early prospection as not only trying to insert a 'body' capable of pursuing 'Space' but to apply such a bodily perception to textuality as well.

Olson's writings on the topic of space gradually take a literal form upon the page, where a typography introduces a literal space that apparently suspends and reforms the historical narrative being written. When making the transition from reading Olson's writing about geographical space to readings of Olson's use of physical space upon the page, Lawrence seems essential. For example, Olson argued for a new way of reading Melville, where the text itself should be handled like a moving object, and it is Lawrence's readings of *Moby Dick* that Olson found to be 'post-modern' in this approach. In *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence is concerned with Melville's literary ability to expose an alienated body (Ahab) that is spatially desensitised by America's transcendentalism and industrialisation. After observing that The Pequod crew is also lacking spatial sensitivity (between its workers and their work), Lawrence uncovers a 'bodily knowledge' and 'vibrational sensitivity' within the text itself, which, Olson writes, 'animates' the material and weight of the text unlike any other reader. By first introducing Olson's early writings on 'prospection,' where Olson repeatedly relies on Lawrence to introduce a bodily perception of history, I then introduce Olson's readings of Lawrence's 'Melville' essays, before finally comparing Lawrence's 'Melville' essays with Olson's *Call Me Ishmael*. Such a Lawrentian context will frame a particular thesis in *Ishmael*, that

Melville sought a 'body' to pursue 'Space' itself, in order to usurp Western 'history' and 'time'. The epigraph to Olson's last section of *Ishmael* is paradigmatic of *Ishmael's* thesis—that Melville 'turned time into space,' as the epigraph will use the space upon the page to represent the history between Noah to Captain Pollard, two bodies that traumatically encountered open space. The closing epigraph thus acts as a colophon, an emblem informing the content and form of *Ishmael* itself, indicative of Olson's subsequent poetry as well.

Butterick had seen that the 'prospective hero' was definitive of Olson's *Ishmael* and his later *Maximus*,<sup>64</sup> but, unlike Butterick's biographical readings, that heroic figure is but an object that exists within a textual space. It is the 'prospective' in *Ishmael* that would eventually lead to the 'projective' in verse, where the poet's language is being moved forward by literal space. The first line of 'Projective Verse' (1950) would portray the linguistic object being pushed through a literal space upon the line's frontier, as the essay begins:

(projectile      (percussive      (prospective      65

Among the myriad of tenets found in 'Projective Verse,' the essay's epigraph first presents textual space as a physical force pushing the objects being projected; a perspective Olson had developed in the mid-1940s. By the late-'40s, signifiers are no longer strictly metaphysical or representational, but are themselves given a concrete chassis by the page's space, seen in the above line. 'Space' is then a signature term in both *Call Me Ishmael* and 'Projective Verse,' for in 'Projective Verse' it is the typographical 'space precisions [that] indicate exactly the breath' of the poet,<sup>66</sup> and the opening line of *Ishmael* (after 'The First Fact') introduces space as the book's central topos: 'I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America'.<sup>67</sup> In both texts, the 'prospective' object charts the historical horizons of space, but it is a physical space nonetheless.

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<sup>64</sup> George Butterick, *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. xxi.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Olson, *Collected Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 239.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 11.

The term 'prospection' often connotes a vision of the future and a positive psychology, but Olson's early usage is quite oppositional to strictly historical or psychological prospection, and is quite similar to Merleau-Ponty's own body-perception. Olson's reinterpretation of Merleau-Ponty in 1962 bears many similarities to Olson's earlier prospective vision, as each composes the subject's history as a perception of a virtual or textual space. In a 1962 interview, 'Under the Mushroom,' Olson addresses the poetic potentialities of psychedelic drugs and speaks to the significance of sensory experiences when forming a narrative, doing so by referring to and quoting *The Phenomenology of Perception*.<sup>68</sup> Olson interprets Merleau-Ponty by expounding upon the perception of text as if it were a phenomenological object, and thus, in this case, the subject's perception of its unfolding history is rather a sense of an 'original text,' an 'archetext,' says Olson, and yet 'this original text is perception itself'.<sup>69</sup> Olson quotes from Merleau-Ponty's chapter, 'The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility,' where Merleau-Ponty describes an object's colour as patchy experiences of the intermediary space between one's self and an object, rather than colour as a distinct object. Olson quotes the chapter: 'The relationship of "figure" and "background," "thing" and "not-thing," and the horizon of the past appear, then, to be structures of consciousness irreducible to the qualities which appear in them'.<sup>70</sup> Perceiving the subject and object as the invisible yet graspable space that moves in between them, Olson conjures up a concept of language as 'archetypology' rather than 'typology,' in order to invoke a vision of history and futurity as a perception of textual space, rather than as quantifiable information, for 'our rational discourse treats typology as relational and statistical instead of initial'. In other words, Olson disrupts 'relational' or linear narratives by perceiving the world through an intermediary physical space that is always being informed by an archetypal textuality. Here Olson seems to be disorienting a subject's sense of history by blurring notions of body, text, and space.

Judith Butler's passing use of the term 'prospective' when introducing Merleau-Ponty's own nascent phenomenology is helpful here, as such a vision perceives one's

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Olson, 'Under the Mushroom,' in *Muthologos*, ed. by Ralph Maud (Vancouver: Talinbooks, 2010), p. 108.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

sensual body as the various horizons of affected, visible and reflective space. In 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranch,' Butler revisits Merleau-Ponty's lectures on Malebranche, Maine de Biran and Henri Bergson, where Merleau-Ponty is 'reconsidering the relation of the body of thought in each instance and elaborating the contours of a prospective philosophical psychology that insists on the centrality of the body to the act of knowing and on the limits imposed on self-knowledge by the body itself'.<sup>71</sup> Butler locates a critical stage wherein Merleau-Ponty appropriates Malebranche in order to conceptualise a germinal form of bodily perception, one that perceives one's horizons within the limits of one's body. Not unlike Olson here, Merleau-Ponty's resistance against objectified and quantifiable knowledge (in history, science and philosophy alike) accounted for the hyper-reflective and hyper-dialectical perception of the body's sensory perception, a perception that embodies a world of sensible space that is simultaneously touching the body. The body-subject of *Phenomenology of Perception*, and the chiasm of Merleau-Ponty's late work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, can be explored in Olson through readings of Lawrence, and Merleau-Ponty will be applied more frequently as this chapter develops. What becomes clear, however, is that while Merleau-Ponty's body of perception exists between the artist, his world, and his canvas, Olson's world exists upon the page, where a bodily form of space is working as well.

From the beginning of Olson's literary career, Lawrence initially appears as that solitary figure who resists forms of historicism and psychological introspection, although to maintain a resistance to such also means to maintain that which is being resisted. Thus Olson's historical dimension remains characteristic of his Poundian heritage, yet Olson's prospection is modeled on Lawrence. As early as 1945, Olson had proclaimed Lawrence as the paragon of prospective vision, particularly for having the 'fleshings out' of a vision against the high-modernist proclivity for intellectual history, which, according to Olson, Pound and Joyce had championed. In what appears to be a draft of the essay 'This Is Yeats Speaking' (1946), entitled 'Joyce, Pound and W.B. Yeats,' Olson states that historicism is but a modernist trend that Yeats and Lawrence rightfully abandoned, because they had 'true vision.' Olson writes, '[Yeats] missed his day as Joyce and Pound

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<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranch,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B. N. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 184.



could not. D.H. Lawrence and Yeats look alike, seen from this angle. It is strange, really, for both Yeats and Lawrence had fleshings out of the future never vouchsafed to Joyce and Pound. They had prophecy in them when Joyce and Pound had the historic dimension. But in that time of the turning of the blade, 1900-1920, it seems to have been better, stronger creatively, to be historic'.<sup>72</sup> Yeats and Lawrence had prophetic potential that could be reaped in the future, while the historicism of Joyce and Pound, Olson writes, was needed from 1900-1920.

The final version of 'This Is Yeats Speaking' was composed in September 1945, directly after *Call Me Ishmael* was written (*Ishmael* had commenced that August);<sup>73</sup> thus the final drafting of *Call Me Ishmael* and the drafting of 'This Is Yeats Speaking' seem paired in their prospective theorising. In 'This is Yeats Speaking' Olson now personifies Yeats and attacks Pound directly. Creeley's later essay 'A Note on Ezra Pound' (1965) would recall Olson's 'This is Yeats' as exonerating Pound,<sup>74</sup> but the essay casts Pound in a poor light compared to Lawrence. In the final 'This is Yeats' Olson wrote, '[Pound] you were ever in haste' and 'a true lover of order'.<sup>75</sup> Pound, continues Olson, 'was false—out of phase—when he subordinated his critical intelligence to the objects of authority in others. If the Positive Man do that, all the cruelty and narrowness of his intellect are displayed in service of preposterous purpose after purpose till there is nothing left but the fixed idea and some hysterical hatred'.<sup>76</sup> Although Olson is speaking as Yeats, his own criticism is evident here, as Olson reissues similar statements in other essays such as 'Grampa, Goodbye' (1948).<sup>77</sup> Peter Middleton reads 'This is Yeats Speaking' as advocating a scientific materialism which also attacks Pound's 'scientific illiteracy',<sup>78</sup> however, despite waving Goethe's science in Pound's face, it is not the scientist that Olson calls for, but the single poetic of Lawrence: 'Lawrence among us alone had the true mask, he lacked the

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<sup>72</sup> 'Joyce, Pound and W.B. Yeats,' SUNY, Buffalo, Special Collections (31-1602, 3).

<sup>73</sup> Robert von Hallberg, *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (Boston: Harvard University Press: 1978), p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Creeley, 'A Note on Ezra Pound,' in *The Collected Essays of Robert Creeley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 142.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Middleton, 'Discoverable unknowns: Olson's lifelong preoccupation with the sciences,' in *Contemporary Olson* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2015), p. 38.

critical intelligence, and was prospective'.<sup>79</sup> Olson invokes the Yeatsian mask or pose here—a disguised performance more relevant than the veiled subject underneath. The Yeatsian mask is the proud pose of Lawrence's anti-intellectualism and body-consciousness, an observation Olson makes in echoing his readings of Aldous Huxley's own remarks in Lawrence's *Letters*,<sup>80</sup> where Huxley writes, 'Lawrence disapproved of too much knowledge,' which has 'diminished men's sense of wonder and blunted their sensitiveness to the great mystery,' a mystery related to 'the blood and the flesh'.<sup>81</sup>

Olson held Lawrence as the prototypical 'prospective' poet during the writing of *Ishmael* and immediately after its completion. In a lecture drafted in 1947, 'Idea for Series of Lectures at Richman's Institute of Contemporary Arts,' Olson again lauds Lawrence's avoidance of a certain intellectualism, and does so by projecting historical narratives as if they themselves were formed organically, emanating from the viewer's body. The notes begin by lambasting Christianity, though not for its belief in a Creator but because its 'two great schisms (Protestantism and Catholicism) have so obscured what man's sense of Christianity was before them that when we talk of Christianity today, and the roots of its faith, we talk mostly in the dark, and about half or quarter facts'.<sup>82</sup> For Olson, the creative act of Christianity was more acceptable than its modern historicisation and doctrine, which has lost its true object. Olson continues by criticising those 'who looked in the present fragments of the past [by going] half-blind about the organic ways men lived,' which includes J.G. Frazer and Freud, the latter of which 'spent most of his life in a mine shaft,' although Freud 'came out some in his last book,' *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>83</sup> A work first considered anthropological and then fantastical, *Totem and Taboo* is perhaps forgiven by Olson for the very same reason scholars had debunked it, since the book reconstructs history to fit the author's own vision of the mind, e.g. Oedipal. But suddenly Lawrence arrives with exceptional prospection, as Olson concludes: 'Actually,

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<sup>79</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 144.

<sup>80</sup> Ralph Maud, *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 87. Ralph Maud notes that Olson had read Huxley's introduction to Lawrence's *Letters*.

<sup>81</sup> Aldous Huxley, 'Introduction,' in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence* (New York: Viking Press, 1932), p. xiv.

<sup>82</sup> 'Idea for Series of Lectures at Richman's Institute of Contemporary Arts (1947),' SUNY, Buffalo, Special Collections (31-1593, 2).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

as of this power of the organism I suppose D.H. Lawrence had more than any of them, even though he made a sentiment and a cult of it. It was because he was the poet, and thus the more prospective.)).<sup>84</sup> Against religious, scientific and historical scholasticism, Lawrence's prospective poetic fosters an organic power for Olson, one not so much embedded in scientific organicity but in the primordial consciousness of the body. Lawrence's letter to Andrew Skinner in 1917 speaks to Olson's reading, where 'reading Frazer's *Golden Bough* and *Totemism and Exogamy*' strengthens Lawrence's conception of 'a connection between my mental-consciousness and an outside body, forming a percept'; a perception unlike the 'vision' of the 'eyes' or 'mind,' but a 'blood-consciousness' wrought with the 'sexual connection'.<sup>85</sup> Lawrence's *Movements in European History* (1921) is perhaps indicative of Lawrence's historicism, since *Movements* narrates Western history much like a children's book, largely following the antagonisms between the Roman Church and the mysterious paganism of Germanic tribes.<sup>86</sup> What Olson does see in Lawrence is a conscious balancing act, wherein the writer perceives a world and kneads a narrative of the body itself, resisting scientific codification and objective historicisation while using such as supportive material.

The prospection attributed to Lawrence from '45 to '47 was next defined in Olson's 1948 essay, 'Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective'. Although Lawrence is not cited in the essay, Lawrence now provides critical context for the unique form Olson begins to exhibit, which will construct an image of man from historical material, but inlay such objects within a form consisting of the page's sensible space. Before depicting an example, the essay will list three prospective tenets, first proposing that 'Man as object is equatable to all other nature, is neutron'.<sup>87</sup> In this nod to 'nature' and 'neutron,' Olson gives neither a positive nor negative charge to his form, but posits the textual object as itself a grain in space being moved by conflicted forces. This form, however, cannot be scientifically quantified, as the second principle states that the poet's

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Volume II*, ed. by George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 407.

<sup>86</sup> *Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography*, p. 177. Olson appears not to have read *Movements*, but knew of it.

<sup>87</sup> Charles Olson, 'Notes for the Proposition: Man is Prospective,' *boundary 2*, 2:1/2 (Autumn 1973-Winter 1974), p. 3.

prospective object *cannot* be represented as 'mass or economic integer,' for space keeps the object mutable and in motion.<sup>88</sup> By re-mapping the poet as an object of space, and not merely as the subject derived from linear narratives or histories of western growth, Olson's third principle renders 'man as object in space as against man as subject of time'.<sup>89</sup> The prospective object is thus a spatial and organic form moving in non-Euclidean time. A topographical image or rebus-like projection is then given, which reconfigures various historical figures (proper nouns as organs) as if the subjective poet (Man) were comprised by the poem (object) itself as it moves and morphs in a bodily form of space across the page, that is, in order to 'see our time at one glance':

(Marx Darwin Renan Fourier Sorel  
 Frazer Freud Spengler Kierkegaard  
 Einstein De Sitter Frobenius  
 & some now alive Saint Francis )<sup>90</sup>

The essay and image present a bodily perception of Olson's arriving poetic, where a contoured form of space holds linguistic and (a)historical material upon the page within 'one glance.' The lines and naming therein are broken up by physicalised space, as extra spacing is allotted between names while the borders of its parenthetical body (or quasi-stanza) are incrementally pushed forward (especially the extending, closing parenthesis), as if the entire concept was being moved by, and within, space; as if embodying space. The prospective poet thus comprises a narrative of an object being formed *by* space, *through* space, and is, more specifically, *of* space, rather than of an object or structured narrative being set *in* space.

In each of these essays, wherein Olson continues to outline a Lawrentian prospection, Olson will first introduce the antithesis of prospection (e.g. historicism, quantification, Euclidean time). The prospective is then subsequently presented as adverse, giving friction to the unnatural drive of intellectual ideality and quantifiable knowledge (scientific, economic, historic), which was alienating to both Olson and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

Lawrence. Unlike the Poundian 'positive man of order,' Olson and Lawrence scrutinised Americanisation and global capitalism but did so by re-introducing a different sense of space within that history. Olson and Lawrence's use of Melville is a primary example, for they both see *Moby Dick* as a narrative driven by America's industrialisation of the frontier, within the tradition of Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History*, but their critique of such a history is to provoke a new consciousness or experience of living space. Olson studied the frontier in his American Studies doctoral program at Harvard, where Professor Merk's course, 'History 62 (Westward Movement)', had assigned Jackson's *Frontier*, which Olson later recommended to Ed Dorn<sup>91</sup> in *A Biography for Ed Dorn*, along with Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Studies*. Building upon such a tradition, *Call Me Ishmael* first introduces the capitalisation of the frontier by America's fishing and whaling industry, in order to offer alternative modes of approaching 'space,' for 'Some men ride on such space [while] others have to fasten themselves like a tent stake to survive. As I see it Poe dug in and Melville mounted'.<sup>92</sup> Olson first introduces Melville's protagonist, Ishmael, as a labourer simply riding the industrial 'machine'. After prefacing America as 'geography at bottom, a hell of a wide land from the beginning,' Olson focuses on the exploitation of space, since 'the machine,' not the 'democrats,' 'is the only master of space the average person ever knows, oxwheel to piston, muscle to jet. It gives trajectory. To Melville it was not the will to be free but the will to overwhelm nature that lies at the bottom of us as individuals and a people'.<sup>93</sup> But when reexamining exactly how Melville 'mounted' or laid hold of 'space' in Olson's *Ishmael*, to harness a different experience of space, Lawrence's own prospection of how American space is provoking a new consciousness is helpful.

In *Terra Incognita: D.H. Lawrence and the Frontiers*, Virginia Hyde observed that Lawrence's *Studies* comes from the tradition of Turner,<sup>94</sup> as Lawrence analyses the alienation brought to America's various frontiers—the Western in Fenimore Cooper, the

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<sup>91</sup> Charles Olson's *Reading: A Biography*, p. 47. Also see *Biography for Ed Dorn*. Olson told Dorn that the "Basic Reading List" is 'Merk (Harvard Press) on Westward Movement,' which, as Ralph Maud notes, 'means Fredrick Jackson Turner and Fredrick Merk, *List of References on the History of the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922; revised 1930)'.

<sup>92</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Virginia Hyde, *Terra Incognita: D.H. Lawrence and the Frontiers* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), p. 27.

Oceanic in Melville, and the Democratic in Whitman. But like his *Studies*, Lawrence's 'Introduction' for Edward Dahlberg's *Bottom Dogs* first critiqued the capitalisation of the frontier in order to awaken a new sense of consciousness that is universally available. In *Bottom Dogs* Lawrence acknowledges: 'It is not till you live in America, and go a little under the surface, that you begin to see how terrible and brutal is the mass of failure that nourishes the roots of the gigantic tree of dollars'.<sup>95</sup> Dahlberg's semi-autobiography had portrayed the decadence of the American West, but the novel's value lies in the literary form in which it captured a 'psychic disintegration,' writes Lawrence, and in this sense the novel is 'a good many stages ahead,' for within the 'Homeric' tradition of 'pioneer literature,' Dahlberg's novel 'reveals a condition that not many of us have reached, but towards which the trend of consciousness is taking us, all of us, especially the young. It is, let us hope, a *ne plus ultra*'.<sup>96</sup> The state of consciousness Lawrence envisions here is not American, but one wherein human connections are reestablished with that 'old sympathetic glow,' with 'spontaneous warmth,' which should arrive after this 'phenomenon of physical repulsion'.<sup>97</sup> Lawrence and Olson will both contextualise capitalism's alienation before then focusing on a new body-consciousness on the horizon.

Criticism has only suspected that Olson was familiar with Lawrence's American studies, yet Lawrence's *Studies* continually spoke to Olson's work in *Ishmael*. In 1950 Olson came across a recent review of *Ishmael* and wrote a celebratory letter to Frances Boldereff, since the critic was 'linking [me] to one to whom, at this moment, [I] would rather be linked than any other known man, David Herbert Lawrence'.<sup>98</sup> Although Olson's common praises of Lawrence relate to an array of poetic concepts, *Ishmael* provides a common thread. Lawrence's work on Melville is routinely noted for preceding *Ishmael* but Olson's direct reception is insufficiently examined. For example, JoEllyn Clarey

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<sup>95</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Introductions and Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 119.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 124.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>98</sup> Charles Olson and Francis Boldereff, *A Modern Correspondence* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), p. 109. The review was by Stanley Edward Hyman, husband to Shirley Jackson. Hyman would write several articles for the *Hudson Review*, this particular review was published in *Accent Magazine*, wherein Hyman also stated that 'Olson "is the biggest thing in Lawrence disciples since Edward Dahlberg."' Stanley Edgar Hyman, 'review of *Call Me Ishmael*,' *Accent* 8 (Spring, 1948), p. 188.

investigated Lawrence's creative interpretations of *Moby Dick* (where Ishmael dies, unlike in the novel),<sup>99</sup> and Clarey compared the unique liberties which both Lawrence and Olson had taken when reinterpreting the novel: 'Allowing for such discrepancies [between *Moby Dick* and Lawrence's readings] requires a most tolerant sense of poetic license—as has been granted by Ann Charters to both Lawrence and Charles Olson'.<sup>100</sup> Ann Charters's *Olson/Melville: A Study of Affinity* had also noted that both Lawrence and Olson 'had a revelation after an encounter with *Moby-Dick*: The success of *Call Me Ishmael*, like *Studies in Classic American Literature*, lies in its being a unique performance, Olson and Lawrence projecting a kind of poetic monodrama sustained by a creative vision (not rationale) of great force and decisiveness'.<sup>101</sup> Charters would find two Lawrentian traits in *Ishmael*, though indirectly, since Dahlberg was a Lawrentian, and Dahlberg had influenced parts of *Ishmael* (part IV of *Ishmael* is dedicated to Dahlberg). Charters writes, 'Dahlberg emphasized, like Lawrence, the sexual inhibitions brought about by a stifling industrial society'.<sup>102</sup> And Charters also notes that Lawrence comes through with the 'literary tone' of *Ishmael*: its 'audacity, the tone of a man utterly sure of his own voice'.<sup>103</sup> But while Clarey and Charters see similarities in Lawrence's and Olson's creative but separate renditions, they fail to observe Olson's direct reception of Lawrence. An ironic example of this oversight is when Chad Walsh introduced Olson's odd oratorical style at the second Beloit lecture in '68, 'I do hope the author of *Call Me Ishmael* won't take offense if I introduce him by quoting a few words from a 'rival' of his, but I thought one of the things that D.H. Lawrence said about Herman Melville applied particularly and aptly to our experience this week,<sup>104</sup> to which Olson replied, 'That's too much. Thank you. That puts my father right on top of me, like—if you heard who that was

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<sup>99</sup>JoEllyn Clarey, 'D.H. Lawrence's 'Moby Dick': A Textual Note,' *Modern Philology*, 84:2 (Nov., 1986), pp. 191-195. Clarey shows that some of Lawrence's inventive interpretations may have been influenced by his 1907 Everyman edition, which omits the 'Epilogue' explaining Ishmael's survival, and contained some different quotes that Lawrence re-issued.

<sup>100</sup> 'Lawrence's 'Moby Dick': A Textual Note,' p. 191.

<sup>101</sup> Ann Charters, *Olson/Melville: A Study of Affinity* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1968), p. 53.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Olson, *Poetry and Truth: the Beloit lectures and poems* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1971), p. 41. Walsh goes on to read a passage from Lawrence's *Studies*: 'He was a real American in that he always felt his audience in front of him. But when he ceases to be American, when he forgets all audience, and gives us his sheer apprehension of the world, then he is wonderful, his book commands a stillness in the soul, as awe'. Ibid.

saying'.<sup>105</sup> The rivalry prefaced by Walsh, albeit half-seriously, is often presumed to be an implicit influence upon Olson, as seen in Paul Christensen's *Call Him Ishmael*, where Christensen routinely lists what is generally considered *Ishmael*'s primary influences: 'it is evident throughout that [Olson] intended to rival the other seminal studies of the era: Dahlberg's *Can These Bones Live*; D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*; and William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*'.<sup>106</sup> Such listings of *Ishmael*'s precursors, however, ignore Olson's preference for Lawrence's *Studies*.

Lawrence's *Studies* exposes a sense of moving space that neither Dahlberg nor Williams were concerned with; a subject Olson would explicate at various times. Unlike their contemporaries, Olson saw Lawrence performing readings of Melville that would experience the text as moving objects in space, rendering the textual surface itself as the material grounds for mapping a sense of historicity rather than performing strictly historical or biographical readings of the novel. Besides linking *Ishmael* to Lawrence in the above letter, Olson wrote to Creeley in 1951 to explain his current theory of 'the noun force, the magical of the noun as recurrence of the object',<sup>107</sup> that is, how a proper object (like Ahab or Maximus) can be shown moving across the line or page. Olson provides a timeline of this study, again bridging his Melville studies to his present poetic through Lawrence's *Studies*:

So I

was off, by way of Bill's relation to Poe (it has always seemed to me his best piece, there—that, & the Lincoln) and I hammered on abt Whitman as behind EP, and Melville behind who (not, of course, being able to say). Which then brought DHL as, by way of his STUDIES, practically an American writer!<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 41. Olson repeatedly calls two poets his 'father,' Pound and DHL.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Christensen, *Call Him Ishmael* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), p. 31.

<sup>107</sup> *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley*, vol 7, p. 43. See Carla Billiterri's *The American Cratylism*, on Olson and the Noun or naming function, although Billiterri's study of Olson's poetic disregards studies of form and space.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.



Though the parenthetical note on Melville is a gesture of non-disclosure, Olson relates Melville to a handling of nouns as moving objects, and does so through Lawrence's *Studies*. In fact, in the coming months Olson completed an essay on how a reader should handle a text as if it were itself comprised of physical objects, entitled 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville'. The essay presents an exhaustive review of Melville criticism by selecting those few who recognise *Billy Budd* as a failure (due to its superfluous homage to Hawthorne) and those rare critics who do *not* treat *Moby Dick* as history, per se, but who register the text as material in space. In the essay Lawrence is the exemplary 'post-modern' reader, who represents the three modes which the essay prescribes for reading *Moby Dick*: 1) to read as an 'approach to physicality,' 2) to experience 'character as necessary human force,' and 3) to employ an 'application of intelligence to all phenomena as *the* ordering agent—what Creeley and I have elsewhere called the Single Intelligence'.<sup>109</sup> Olson discounts intellectual history in the essay by prioritising the text as itself a material with weight, capable of movement. Such surface-readings were all too rare at the time, as Olson writes, '[I] can continue to trouble myself about a most different using of Melville—Edward Dahlberg's, in *Do These Bones Live* [and] I can also ask myself why William Carlos Williams has always drawn a blank on Melville'.<sup>110</sup> Olson's 'most different using of Melville,' as contrasted with *Can These Bones Live*, is understandable, as Dahlberg merely integrates Melville into a circuitous chapter conveying the misrecognition of America's founding authors; put concisely, 'Our artists are American Ishmaels doomed to be cut away from the human vineyard,' as even 'Poe has had no critic save D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>111</sup> Williams, on the other hand, completely omits Melville from *In the American Grain*. Therefore, the critical significance of Olson's 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville' is that it does not give a reading of Melville but prescribes a particular hermeneutic by judging other methods of reading. For Olson, Melville's words have a material force that can be tracked like a reading of brail,

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<sup>109</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 116. Olson and Creeley's 'single intelligence' would be developed in the years following *Ishmael*, and is most attributed to Lawrence within a letter to Creeley (vol 7, p. 79), a letter to Corman (vol 1, p. 244), and in Olson's essays 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind' (1950) and 'The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence and the Real' (1951), as well as various poems visited later in this chapter.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>111</sup> Edward Dahlberg, *Can These Bones Live* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 45, 51.

or picked up with an antenna, with an 'approach to physicality' that is the 'application of intelligence to all phenomena as *the* ordering agent'. Olson's vague but supposedly radical hermeneutic is next praised as manifesting solely in Lawrence, as a *faculty sui generis*, for Lawrence is seen as the latest cursed poet of modernity, and a literary registrar of its tides:

I can end this whole first part of the job I wanted for you—give the focus its proper depth—by not letting you or myself forget what these editors of Moby Dick have so outrageously neglected to mention, that the man who more and more stands up as the one man of this century to be put with Melville, Dostoevsky and Rimbaud (men who engaged themselves with modern reality in such fierceness and pity as to be of real use to any of us who want to take on the post-modern) is D.H. Lawrence. He wrote two chapters on Melville in his *Studies in Classic American Literature* which, although they are not the equal of his Whitman chapters, are worth, to men of soul, what Melville's own words are worth.<sup>112</sup>

Olson's term 'post-modern' here in 1952 accompanies what Perry Anderson finds as the first usage in North America, found in Olson's November 2nd, 1952 letter to Creeley;<sup>113</sup> and yet Olson already used the term 'post-modern' when contrasting Lawrence and Pound in '51 to Creeley,<sup>114</sup> which is similarly applied here to Lawrence's 'approach to physicality,' in order to contrast Lawrence's Melville with Williams and Melville scholarship. In returning Melville to Lawrence's post-modernism, Olson also re-routes a transnationalism that is not confined to America's exceptional frontier, but, in Lawrence, Olson pushes a hermeneutic for encountering sensible frontiers within a text. Criticism's neglect of the text as a material space, continues Olson, is why Melville criticism 'still stays obscured,' because 'Leaving this out, failing to get it, makes so much of the work on Melville (the exception is D.H. Lawrence's) merely praise, dispraise, or history; in other words what is left is either the very rationalism Melville spent his life exposing, or just

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<sup>112</sup> *Collected Prose*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>113</sup> Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley*, vol 7, p. 75.

the facts of him without lending those facts an animation the equal of Melville's animation'.<sup>115</sup> Against rationalist reproductions of 'merely' 'history,' Olson renders Lawrence's ability to register and animate the text's movement as an exceptional deviation from the modern trajectory. And yet Olson once again can only elevate Lawrence's resistant prospection from within a historical context.

Lawrence's particular and often peculiar experience of space has been characteristic of his life-writing, fictional and non-fictional. In *Space and Place in the Works of D.H. Lawrence*, Stefania Michelucci states that conceptualisations of place and space often overlap but are 'intrinsically different,' as space 'is in fact a physical and philosophical category, while place is a cultural and anthropological category'.<sup>116</sup> The distinction is critical, in that 'place' is here defined as that which more or less lacks a living body due to its historical conceptualisation. Michelucci notes that Lawrence less often confronts his self in known or settled places, but is instead pulled towards areas of unknown space. While criticism is tempted to structure place and space as concepts that occupy a psychological binary, with 'place' as 'self' and 'space' as 'not-self,' in Lawrence there is no stable binary of 'known/unknown,' writes Michelucci, for Lawrence began 'finding the positive pole in the unknown, which he increasingly identified with the chronologically, spatially, and culturally remote'.<sup>117</sup> When summarising Lawrence's experience of writing as comprised of unknown bodies in unknown spaces, Michelucci is not unaware of Lawrence's leaning towards exoticism:

This existential realization involves the exploration of an 'other' universe, carrying the conviction of the necessity of a polarity in relations between the sexes (which become more vital the more 'distant' the partners), and generating a need to explore new geographical and cultural spaces (Sardinia, Australia, Mexico, the Etruscan world), a need which inevitably is shared by many of his characters who, after a certain point, become, like himself, indefatigable travelers. The need to travel produced in the opus an

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<sup>115</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 117.

<sup>116</sup> Stefania Michelucci, *Space and Place in the Works of D.H. Lawrence* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), p. 1.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

enlargement of horizons, which only came in a gradual and rather tormented way, and which did not always entail his characters' appropriation of new spaces.<sup>118</sup>

Exoticism can be defined as an aesthetic perception, when a foreign object is placed in a symbolic and dialectical position of appropriation which familiarises the object in rendering it predictably unknown.<sup>119</sup> But in arguing that Lawrence perceives 'space,' and a space that is itself the unknown positivity, while notions of place grow predictably foreign, Michelucci touches upon an inverted aesthetic as well. The polarity which Michelucci intimates in Lawrence's opus is not necessarily exotic, but a 'metamorphosis' within the horizons of space.<sup>120</sup>

Lawrence's externalising movement through space, as its own means of coming home, resonates with Tim Woods's recent juxtaposition of Adorno's negative dialectics and Olson's totalising space. Woods finds Adorno's proposition, that 'Dialectics is the consistent sense of non-identity,' compatible with Olson's line, 'the voyage *out* | is the voyage | *in*'.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, Olson's 'insistence on particulars' insists upon ordering the multiplicities of non-identity, writes Woods, and therefore sustains a movement.<sup>122</sup> Woods's reading of Olson's negativising movement, which persistently orders the particular objects of space, also underscores Olson's Lawrentian readings in 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville,' where the text was an 'approach to physicality,' 'character as necessary human force,' and an 'application of intelligence to all phenomena as *the* ordering agent'. Both Olson and Lawrence will share an affinity in rendering a sense of history by transcribing their experiences of space. For in Lawrence's fiction, travel-writing, and letters, an acute attention to the particulars of space seem to propel him into the horizons of non-identity but by embodying its horizons. In *Color, Space, and Creativity: Art and Ontology in Five British Writers*, Jack Stewart shows Lawrence's epistolary writing as capturing a lived space that often exists on the 'horizon,'

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

<sup>119</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 13

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>121</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 233.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

the 'coastal,' on 'movement,' or upon the borders of 'dusk' and 'twilight,' where 'color and space cannot literally be brought into language,' writes Stewart, but where the writer's 'creative responses to physical phenomena, embodied in visual imagery, animate styles and shape responses' which Lawrence calls 'tremulations in [or on] the ether'.<sup>123</sup> It is true that both Lawrence and Olson work from a historiography of place, yet Olson's Lawrentian mapping also savors the impressions of a bodily space beyond place, one presented through one's skin, which compels place and history backwards. Olson's much later poem, 'Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27', is typical in this sense:

No Greek will be able  
to discriminate my body.  
An American  
is a complex of occasions,  
themselves a geometry  
of spatial nature.  
I have this sense,  
that I am one  
with my skin  
Plus this—plus this:  
that forever the geography  
which leans in  
on me I compell  
backwards I compell Gloucester  
to yield, to  
change  
Polis  
is this<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Jack Stewart, *Color, Space, and Creativity: Art and Ontology in Five British Writers* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), p. 16.

<sup>124</sup> Ralph Maud, *A Charles Olson Reader* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd, 2005), p. 67.

The stanza captures the skin as the ordering agent of a 'Plus this—plus this,' which demands that the skin be continually recounted as well. Such a spatial nature pushes historical notions of place 'backwards'. Thus 'Letter 27' finds the Polis in between place and space, where 'to the left the land fell to the city, to the right it fell to the sea'.<sup>125</sup> The form of Olson's diction here is illustrative, as the spatial nature of the poem's form repeatedly interrupts the horizontal progression of the poem's historical discourse, where space can be seen pushing history and Gloucester back.

In Olson's romantic letters to Francis Boldereff, Olson also applies Lawrence's sexually intimate yet adventurous sense of textual space as a form of correspondence. After being impressed with *Ishmael* upon publication, Boldereff began a correspondence with Olson wherein Lawrence is utilised as a device by which Olson and Boldereff can interact, as they each were passionate readers of Lawrence. In a 1950 letter to Boldereff, Olson engages with an unknown body in an unknown space, testifying to the impellent 'COURAGE, perhaps, of exploration, [and] it is why we both respect Lawrence, why I am tempted to think his job on Whitman is his very most usable to the Americans'.<sup>126</sup> The 'Whitman' essay referenced here proposes a theory of bodies traveling upon the 'open road,' and thus the essay resembles Lawrence's focus on Melville's exploration of the Pacific and Cooper's of the frontier, but in Whitman it is the frontier of democracy, where the Body is formed in locating each particular body. Lawrence concludes in 'Whitman':

It is not I who guide my soul to heaven. It is I who am guided by my own soul along the open road, where all men tread. Therefore, I must accept her deep motions of love, or hate, or compassion, or dislike, or indifference. And I must go where she takes me. For my feet and my lips and my body are my soul. It is I who must submit to her.<sup>127</sup>

Lawrence's feminised soul, 'she takes me,' is a body pulling and guiding him into 'the open road'. The differentiation between a bodily soul and the mind is not a reformed

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 430.

<sup>127</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923), p. 263.

duality but a recognition of multiple differences, a democratising road for Lawrence, rather than Whitman's ideal absorption into the 'ONE'. Olson's letter next relates the essay to his *Ishmael*: '(frances, do you suddenly see how joined we are? It is because (it must have been why ISHMAEL caught you) *space* is the reason why we have to do the job'.<sup>128</sup> Olson reiterates to Boldereff that the sense of '*space*' in Lawrence manifested in Lawrence's life as writing, comprising Olson's 'only' example of a literary life lived in space: 'I'm sure, for one thing, one has to be pin-point and over scrupulous with one's use of one's own life to make the damn thing STICK | (i am thinking, at the moment, of only Lawrence as, at least among men, as one who seems to have done it right, used his personal life cleanly, correctly, so far as he could advance it, the area)'.<sup>129</sup> Olson's characterisation of Lawrence, as a life defined by its 'area,' an area mapped upon the body's open road, seems to legitimise the physical and sexual encounters within Lawrence's written space in order to render Olson and Boldereff's correspondence all the more brave and tangible.

Lawrence's space, for Olson, is a pelagic journey in narrative form, of one finding a home by continuing to search in open waters. In *Call Me Ishmael*, 'history' becomes 'space,' and 'The beginning of man was salt sea' to which he returns, where one's body and soul are 'constantly renewed in the unfolding of life in every human individual, is the important single fact about Melville, Pelagic'.<sup>130</sup> Olson's pelagic view could perhaps be likened to Sándor Ferenczi's *Thalassa*, where psyche seeks the fluids of the womb, the origin of life, and thus the sea. But Olson's pelagic inkling brings an unconscious awareness of open space into consciousness, if only to translate such a life into a form of writing. Olson continues the letter, 'For I think the very element of the birth is such a determinant— I am thinking of, beside myself, Lawrence and Melville, who, surely, are each *pelagic*. My hunch would be, that, here, the things are not in balance, but that the man born of the element water is more true than the other man simple because his bias is the actual phylogeny of the species (I suddenly realize I am repeating the base premise of ISHMAEL'.<sup>131</sup> Lawrence too had written in 'Moby Dick' that Melville 'was water-born'

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<sup>128</sup> *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 430.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 481.

<sup>130</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 13.

<sup>131</sup> *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 501.

and on a 'voyage of the soul,'<sup>132</sup> and in 'repeating the base premise of ISHMAEL,' Olson returns to Lawrence's pelagic vision. Their diagnosis of Melville as pelagic may seem archaic, but it is precisely this archaic sense of space, as pre-history, that will provide Olson his 'post-modern' lens, one seen through Lawrence.<sup>133</sup>

Lawrence's writing of *Studies* was itself a means of reaching towards a new space. The collected essays were drafted from 1917 until their publication in '23, and were often written for an American audience and publication. A revised introduction was sent to the *New Republic* in 1920, entitled 'America, Listen to Your Own,' and Lawrence had told Amy Lowell in 1921, 'I always write really towards America,'<sup>134</sup> which was an inclination already expressed to Lowell in 1916 and repeated in the 'Preface' and 'Epilogue' for *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1921). *Studies* includes essays on Benjamin Franklin, de Crèvecoeur, Fenimore Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Dana, Melville and Whitman. The two essays on Melville were conceived after picking up a copy of *Moby Dick* in 1916, which led Lawrence to ask Robert Mountsier for Everyman's Library editions of *Typee* and *Omoo* in 1917.<sup>135</sup> Around that time, Lawrence became increasingly resentful of England, for as early as 1916, after England banned *The Rainbow*, accused Lawrence of espionage in Cornwall, and after England entered WWI, Lawrence told Catherine Carswell, 'In short, I want, immediately or at length, to transfer all my life to America'.<sup>136</sup> John Worthen, Greenspan and Vasey note in the Cambridge Edition of *Studies* that by 1916 Lawrence's 'intensifying interest in the New World increasingly coincided with a fascination with American literature,' and that he 'was no more inclined to separate his views of literature and culture from his ideas about history, society and psychology than he was given to detach his writing from his life'.<sup>137</sup> The same could perhaps be said of

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<sup>132</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature*, pp. 232, 219.

<sup>133</sup> The 'post-modern' is covered in section two and three of this chapter. For example, in Olson's 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind,' in section two, where Olson writes, 'The proposition, then, is this, that the act, the Laurentian act, is the answer to metaphysics, and its high temptation [...] a combination both archiac and prospective, which gives man, in his preoccupation with life, the proper instrumentation for its understanding and use'.

<sup>134</sup> *The American Lawrence*, p. 10.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>137</sup> John Worthen, Greenspan, Vasey, Cambridge Edition of *Studies in Classic American Literature, Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xxviii.



any writer, but the restlessness of Lawrence's interest in America seems to come through in Olson's readings.

Although Olson ranked Lawrence's chapters on Melville second only to Lawrence's 'Whitman chapters,' the Whitman essays are but an explicit response to the questions raised in the preceding Melville essays. Lawrence attacked both Melville and Whitman's ideal democracy—the ideal 'will' of Melville and the ideal 'identity' of Whitman, but Lawrence sees Whitman appeasing some of the body-consciousness which Melville had previously drowned. After Melville's sinking of the *Pequod*, Lawrence concludes, 'IT IS FINISHED. *Consummatum est*,'<sup>138</sup> a biblical reference conveying Melville's crucifixion of the body by his monstrous 'will' to conquer space 'ideally'. Lawrence's 'Whitman' essay transitions seamlessly by next describing the 'postmortem effects'.<sup>139</sup> Lawrence saw, as Olson did, that the body in Melville was disavowed by America's idealisation of modern industry, and Lawrence begins in 'Whitman':

When the *Pequod* went down, she left many a rank and dirty steamboat still fussing in the seas. The *Pequod* sinks with all her souls, but their bodies rise again to man innumerable tramp steamers, and ocean-crossing liners. Corpses.

What we mean is that people may go on, keep on, and rush on, without souls. They have their ego and their will, that is enough to keep them going.

So you see, the sinking of the *Pequod* was only a metaphysical tragedy after all. The world goes on just the same. The ship of the soul is sunk. But the machine-manipulating body works just the same: digests, chews gum, admires Botticelli and aches with amorous love.<sup>140</sup>

After chastising or rather mocking the metaphysical neglect of the body in *Moby Dick*, Lawrence goes on to criticise Whitman's ideal-love, attacking Whitman's 'ALLNESS,' a

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<sup>138</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature*, p. 239.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 241.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 241-242.

'mechanical' 'ONE IDENTITY'.<sup>141</sup> In routine fashion, Lawrence then turns upon Whitman by proposing his own theories of democratic space, wherein bodily souls and identities work together on 'the open road'. The strength of Lawrence's essays on Melville, in other words, is their preparatory framing of a literary space wherein such drowned bodies are finally able to re-surface through Whitman.

Lawrence does not fully advocate Melville's use of space, because Melville is a 'master' of space, an American Viking. Lawrence's essay 'Herman Melville's 'Typee' and 'Omoo' reflects upon Melville's alienated inner-drive towards the horizons of the Pacific, referencing *Typee*, *Omoo*, *White Jacket*, and *Pierre*. The 'Pacific Ocean is aeons older than the Atlantic or the Indian Oceans,'<sup>142</sup> writes Lawrence, and Melville's unconscious drive for space 'is like a Viking going home to the sea, encumbered with age and memories, and a sort of accomplished despair, almost madness';<sup>143</sup> an unconscious drive to the womb. Rather than reading Melville as a whaling expedition, Lawrence finds Melville's text embodying the 'Vikings [...] wandering again,' 'the sea-born people';<sup>144</sup> the thesis being that Melville's metaphysical search for an immemorial home is Ahab's masterful mad-escape into space itself, but without a body to inhabit that space:

And never was a man so passionately filled with the sense of vastness and mystery of life which is non-human. He was mad to look over our horizons. Anywhere, anywhere out of our world. To get away. To get away, out!

To get away, out of our life. To cross a horizon into another life. No matter what life, so long as it is another life.

Away, away from humanity. To the sea. The naked, salt, elemental sea. To go to sea, to escape humanity. [...]

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 247.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 194.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

So he finds himself in the middle of the Pacific. Truly over a horizon.<sup>145</sup>

Invoking Baudelaire, Lawrence examines the decadence of Melville's attempt to master space and Ahab's empty plunge, since both were bodiless. Lawrence writes, 'Melville at his best invariably wrote from a sort of dream-self, so that events which he relates as actual fact have indeed a far deeper reference to his own soul, his own inner life,'<sup>146</sup> but it is a life that dreams of a lost object in space (the white whale) and does not restore one's bodily-soul as the object of space.

Amidst Melville's alienated narrative, Lawrence can nevertheless feel the friction of space in Melville's writing. In the following essay, 'Moby Dick,' Lawrence will first mock Melville's metaphysics by putting on a less serious voice, countering Melville's unconscious obsession with sensible disinterestedness.

The man is rather a tiresome New Englander of the ethical mystical-transcendentalist sort: Emerson, Longfellow, Hawthorne, etc. So unrelieved, the solemn ass even in humour. So hopelessly *au grand sérieux*, you feel like saying: Good God, what does it matter? If life is a tragedy, or a farce, or a disaster, or anything else, what do I care! Let life be what it likes. Give me a drink, that's what I want just now.<sup>147</sup>

Melville's Hawthornean transcendentalism, which Olson saw grossly idealised in *Billy Budd*, is a modern state missing real bodily contact in *Moby Dick*. When first analysing Melville, Lawrence addresses the author, 'the man' who 'is like Dana,' since 'Melville is almost dead. That is, he hardly reacts to human contacts any more: or only ideally: or just for a moment'.<sup>148</sup> Melville's lack of human contact is like Ishmael's own shyness when bunking up with Queequeg, continues Lawrence, for 'you see Melville hugged in bed by a huge tattooed South Sea Islander, and solemnly offering burnt offering to this savage's

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, pp. 197-198.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

little idol, and his ideal frock-coat just hides his shirt-tails and prevents us from seeing his bare posterior as he salaams, while his ethical silk hat sits correctly over his brow the while'.<sup>149</sup> Melville's religious or mystical idealism is seen as exceptionally disconnected and 'so typically American'.<sup>150</sup> Like America, The Pequod is an industrial ship of individual members who are neither emotionally nor physically connected with one another: '[one] would think this relation with Queequeg meant something to Ishmael,' Lawrence continues, 'But no. Queequeg is forgotten like yesterday's newspaper. Human things are only momentary excitements or amusements to the American Ishmael'.<sup>151</sup> In 'Moby Dick,' physical interaction and spatial sensitivity are voided by the ideals of modern desire:

And in a mad ship, under a mad captain, in a mad, fanatic's hunt.  
 For what?  
 For Moby Dick, the great white whale.  
 But splendidly handled. Three splendid mates. The whole thing  
 practical, eminently practical in its working. American industry!  
 And all this practicality in the service of a mad, mad chase.<sup>152</sup>

Melville's dreamscape is fueled by America's desensitised industrialism, for 'Their ideals are like armour which has rusted in, and will never more come off'.<sup>153</sup> But Lawrence then makes a vital distinction, *not* between Melville 'the man' and Melville-the-artist, but between the author's idealism and a sensual body that nevertheless emerges, almost defiantly, within a form of writing that seeks to divorce such idealism: 'And meanwhile in Melville his bodily knowledge moves naked, a living quick among the stark elements. For with sheer physical, vibrational sensitiveness, like a marvelous wireless-station, he registers the effects of the outer world. And he records also, almost beyond pain or pleasure, the extreme transitions of the isolated, far-driven soul, the soul which is now

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, pp. 216-217.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 219.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, pp. 222-223.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 223.

alone, without any real human contact'.<sup>154</sup> Such 'bodily knowledge' is recorded in the naked movement of 'sheer physical, vibrational sensitiveness,' which Lawrence picks up as a body of text that surfaces in contradistinction to the mechanically 'driven soul'. Lawrence's double-handed reading here, which touches upon a textual body that is being voided by its historical contexts, speaks directly to Olson's characterisation of Lawrence in 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville,' where Lawrence represents an 'approach to physicality' and 'the Single Intelligence,' registering spatial phenomena hermeneutically, like an antenna.

Similar to Lawrence, Olson reads Melville's search for history as an experience of 'space' itself. Olson and Lawrence view the body's detachment from space as an American trait, in order to propose a new way of grasping space, as concluded in *Studies* and in *Ishmael*. In *Ishmael*, Olson, like Lawrence, will see Melville's archaic relation to space pushing 'history' backwards: 'Melville had a way of reaching back through time, until he got history pushed back so far he turned time into space'.<sup>155</sup> The textual object of Ahab's character thus becomes an actual instrument for Melville's experience of history as the pursuit of space: 'This captain, Ahab by name, knew space,' and like the mad Melville and his Ahab, who had unconsciously pursued space in Lawrence's *Studies*, Olson likewise concludes in *Ishmael*'s introduction: 'This Ahab had gone wild. The object of his attention was something unconscionably big and white. He had become a specialist: he had all space concentrated into the form of a whale called Moby Dick'.<sup>156</sup> As such, Olson does not so much see Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick as a violent hunt for a whale, but as a resistant voyage to embody space; as Ahab himself proposed to his crew—to pursue the legendary Whale is to all together suspend their money-making venture. For Olson, such initiative is to restore the 'body' of 'space' and to pause over the very violent history of Western industry culminating in the American frontier.

In 'Part Three' of *Ishmael*, Olson describes Melville's tactical rebellion against 'the Father' and the Father's 'time,' since the history of Western religion and its Law is but a paternal lineage of perpetuating violence, traveling down from Kronos. The law of 'Kronos' is a history that requires each son to murder their Father, like 'Uranus' or

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>155</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 19.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 18

'Enceladus,' who was 'a constant image in Melville'.<sup>157</sup> But 'Melville wanted a god,' writes Olson, though not one that would simply replace God, but 'a god' to oppose the logic of the Law. Thus, Olson argues, Melville chose to seek that which is outside the Father's kingdom—to pursue 'Space' itself. 'Space was the paradise Melville was exile of,' claims Olson, for 'the concord of Space, "sweet milk" to Melville as universal peace was to Shakespeare's Malcolm, was curdled and made sour by man, and blood'.<sup>158</sup> The significance of such an observation, Olson writes, is that to pursue 'Space,' in order to suspend the violent history of the Father, Melville had to restore the body as the mode of experiencing and capturing 'Space.' For example, 'Osiris, hero and god, was mangled by his son and enemy Seth' and was 'rent into fourteen pieces and scattered amongst the Nile,' yet Melville's mission was not to perpetuate murder in revenge, but to revivify the 'body' through that which does not reaffirm the Father: 'Space'.<sup>159</sup> Olson continues, 'Space and time were not abstraction but the body of Melville's experience, and he cast the struggle in their dimension'.<sup>160</sup> Like Olson's theories of 'prospective poet,' the 'body' of 'Space' is cast against 'time' and its violent history. For Melville, Olson reiterates, Space, and not the Father, is the First Cause and Prime Mover: 'Space was the First, before time, earth, man.'<sup>161</sup> With such a reading, one may indeed read Olson's prospective historiography in *Ishmael* as constructing a historical narrative, but it is a narrative comprised by a perception of the body's relation to Space.

The linear layout of *Ishmael* begins with geographical and historical references to 'SPACE,' but the book's treatment and conceptualisation of space morphs throughout its chapters, leaving critics without a single concrete definition of *Ishmael's* use of 'space'. Anne Charters and Reitha Pattison both note that the connotations of 'space' in *Ishmael* are inconsistent, which, for Pattison, leaves an obscurity requiring the critic to depend

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<sup>157</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 74.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p. 75. As we will soon see, in my following section on Olson, his 1949 poem, 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing,' has a similar narrative, as the 'enemy' of Olson is 'time' itself, which eats away the 'Father' and renders a violent history of the West (from the genocide of Native Americans to Hitler's concentration camps), yet the form of 'an Olson' responds by pursuing the sensual 'fragrance' of 'space.'

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

upon Olson's much later theories.<sup>162</sup> However, just as Olson had repeatedly introduced antithetical notions of history in order to tease out the prospective in the essays surrounding *Ishmael*, *Ishmael* can be seen as proffering an antagonistic presentation of history as geography and economics before moving into textual and sensual space. Olson had famously opened *Ishmael* by stating: 'I take SPACE to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now. I spell it large because it comes large here. Large, and without mercy'.<sup>163</sup> Space comes without mercy in America because it is a destructive force when repressed. In the 'First Fact is Prologue,' Olson recounts Captain Pollard and Owen Chase's traumatic whale attack, their cannibalism and survival, for 'Pollard never went to sea again' upon his return, and in the final section of *Ishmael*, Olson concludes with Melville's own experience of suspended time, for 'Melville told Hawthorne he dated his life from his return from the Pacific'.<sup>164</sup> Thus the apparent history and geography of 'space' in *Ishmael* is sandwiched between two physical experiences of space that rather suspend time or history.

By opening and closing *Ishmael* with two traumatic experiences of space, Olson provides two bookends for *Ishmael*'s historiography. This overarching reading of the book, as a history between bodies of space, is also illustrated in *Ishmael*'s closing epigraph. The epigraph of *Ishmael*'s 'A Last Fact' is a spatial image and projection of history similar to that found in 'Man is Prospective',<sup>165</sup> but this image was written from Melville's own pen. Olson introduces the concluding epigraph by explaining that the following image was found in the 'back pages of the second of the two notebooks which go to make *Journal Up The Straits*,' written among Melville's scattered notes for stories that were to be 'turned into verse'.<sup>166</sup> Olson continues, 'you will find one note unrelated to the others and untraceable to the *Journal* or later work, a title, a noun (or another title) and a name, as Melville set them down together, in a triangle thus':

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<sup>162</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 55.

<sup>163</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 17.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>165</sup> (Marx Darwin Renan Fourier Sorel  
 Frazer Freud Spengler Kierkegaard  
 Einstein De Sitter Frobenius  
 & some now alive Saint Francis )

<sup>166</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 95.

Eclipse.		
Noah after the Flood.	Cap.[tain] Pollard.	
	of Nant.[ucket]	167

This image, as Olson introduces it, carries the 'noun' through space as if through history. Melville's own depiction here seems uncanny in its resonance with Olson's own prospective images for a body of space. Here the historical objects of 'Noah,' 'Eclipse' and 'Pollard' are not suspended in a void or empty space, but rather presented as moving through a sea of space in order to form a notion of history at one glance. The two human forms—Noah and Pollard—are darkened underneath the Eclipse, in an illuminated space. Noah had first begotten a postdiluvian history, which is a western history simply blotted out as it sails under the Eclipse, until Melville sees a similar event in Pollard's trauma at sea. It may be important to note that Olson is not prescribing trauma as a remedy against modernised 'time,' but he suggests that in changing one's relation to space, to a sensible one, the traumas brought by America's imperial disavowal of bodily space may be placated. The topography of Olson's epigraph presents history as an object of space and anticipates the topography of Olson's 'post-modern' poem, 'La Préface' (1949), when he writes, 'Draw it thus: (     ) 1910 (     ', as discussed in my following section. Such an image also informs the epigraph of Olson's 'Projective Verse' (1950):

(projectile     (percussive     (prospective

In each case, 'Space' is not merely an empty void, nor is it strictly a geographical measurement or historical concept. Rather, the narrative seems optimally worked out for when working within the physical space of the page.

In closing *Ishmael*, Olson again exemplifies his 'prospective' vision of 'space' as both a sensual and textual exploration. As Lawrence had prophesied the trending consciousness rising out of *Bottom Dogs*, a '*ne plus ultra*,' Olson too, nearly twenty years later, witnessed a growing perception of space in 'The conclusion' of *Ishmael*: 'What the Pacific was to HM: (1) *an experience of SPACE* most Americans are only now entering

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 95.



on, 100 years after Melville'.<sup>168</sup> Olson does not elaborate upon this cultural prediction in detail, but he does offer a perspective by quickly chronicling America's old and new modes of transportation. In listing off the 'caravel, prairie schooner, national road, railway, plane. Now in the Pacific THE CARRIER. Trajectory,' Olson introduces American geography with its military-industrial complex, but he also touches on what is potentially missing from certain ventures. Since 'Space has a stubborn way of sticking to Americans,' because 'We must go over space, or we wither,' Olson prefers methods of transport that confront the physicality of space, which sitting in an airplane cannot do: '*Exception*: the plane. It is a time experience, not of space'.<sup>169</sup> Once again Olson positions his sense of space as that which is against 'time,' suggesting that the plane is enclosed, far above the earth, in a mechanical abstraction of time. Olson stipulates: 'We are (inevitably?), as humans, Antaeus: only in touch with the land and water of the earth do we keep out WEIGHT, retain POTENTIAL'.<sup>170</sup> The final chapter quickly outlines an 'economic history' behind the relationship between Americans and the America's plains (what is today called the Flyover Country). The plains, Olson argues, are but an extension of the Atlantic. And like the Atlantic, the lands are also transformed from what was potentially unknown space into a realm of mercantilism. Olson sees Columbus's expedition as enacting a shift from experiencing the Atlantic as unknown space to capitalising on the frontiers, just as the Greeks had done to their Mediterranean.<sup>171</sup> By presenting an abridged economic history of the West in his final chapter, Olson can then conclude with the 'prospective' objects of Homer's Ulysses and Melville's Ahab, as potential instruments to explore space.

Like Olson's later reinterpretation of Merleau-Ponty, which narrativises the body's perception of space as an originating text, *Ishmael*'s conclusion draws out a history where Homer, Dante and Melville use their poetic object (or protagonist) to tap into an unknown space outside of the economic sphere. The Greeks had an economic base 'locked tight in River Ocean,' circling around but never including that which was beyond

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<sup>168</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 101.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*.

River Oceanus, as in 'Anaximander's map'; 'like a serpent with tail in mouth'.<sup>172</sup> But by breaking into the 'unknown,' through the force of Ulysses, Homer reawakened an unfamiliar sense. This prospection of an archetext is why '(1) *an experience of SPACE*' includes '(2) a comprehension of PAST' and '(3) a confirmation of FUTURE'.<sup>173</sup> Homer had bestowed upon his object the 'central quality' of the 'hero', '*search, the individual responsible to himself*',<sup>174</sup> and in 'Dante's hands,' Olson continues, 'Ulysses is again prospective'.<sup>175</sup> Olson observes that, like a captain to his crew, Dante's *Inferno* demanded of its followers: 'who through a hundred thousand dangers have reached the West, deny not, to this brief vigil of your senses that remains, experience of the unpeopled world behind the sun'.<sup>176</sup> In appealing to the 'senses,' Olson's 'prospective hero' calls for a sensible experience of space within a poetic textuality. Such is the tradition Olson sees Melville rehearsing, as Ahab breaches the Pacific realm after the Atlantic became an economic enterprise. What appears essential for Olson's *Ishmael* is a narrativising process which can exhibit how a reader's perception of a primal sense of textual space may reorient a history for the Western subject. And such a reorientation relies upon Olson's transatlantic reception of Lawrence.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

## Saturating 'Projective Verse' in a Body of Space:

1949-1950

Olson's 1950 manifesto, 'Projective Verse,' made such an immediate and lasting impact upon modern and post-modern American poetry that much of his other poetics have fallen into its wake. Certain key tropes in 'Projective Verse,' such as the poet's 'breath' and its correlation to the 'syllable,' have provided criticism with a template capable of subsuming other facets in the essay, including corresponding variations for the concept of 'space'. One such consequence in scholarship is a lost sense of how Olson's form is shaped and navigated by a vital sense of physical space, conceptually and upon the page. 'Projective Verse' had stressed the significance of the poet's 'breath' upon the poetic line, introducing a corporeal element into a new 'open verse,' but since the poet's breath, whether inhaled or exhaled, is either outside or above the poem, Dan Katz has shown that critics and poets have each read the form of 'space' in Olson's verse as 'bestowed' upon the poem, as 'essentially aural, temporal and above all, cyclical, and also rooted in the internal workings of the body' rather than directing the poem's material 'shape'.<sup>177</sup> During the composition of 'Projective Verse,' Olson was concerned with the poet's geographical and historical relations to space, but Olson's growing sense of the body's sensual interaction with space was rapidly developing into a form upon the page as well. Olson's poetry in 1949 and 1950 exemplifies a poetics formed around breathing space, yet the poem also exhibits a bodily structure, which, in certain poems, is portrayed as walking and swimming within the page's space. In order to transpose Olson's concept of a sensual and mobile body onto his poetry, to saturate and alter his projective verse with the textual substance of space, Olson's corresponding readings of D.H. Lawrence once again appear decisive.

Still, Olson's reliance upon Lawrence continues to be overlooked in criticism, despite Olson's intense studies of Lawrence in 1950. For example, 'The Escaped Cock:

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<sup>177</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 81. Also see Michael Davidson, where Olson's 'breath' is but 'a general emotional thrust' within Olson's syntax—a set rhythm rather than linguistic particle.

Notes on Lawrence and the Real' was published in 1951, and 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind' (1950) came out alongside 'Projective Verse'. Both essays express Olson's extreme investment in Lawrence's perception of the body as a sensible mode of resistance, especially against instrumental reason. 'High Temptation' goes so far as to claim that Lawrence's intellectual predisposition for sensuality 'is the answer to metaphysics' and a relevant version of the Messiah. In reviewing Olson's readings of Lawrence during these years, several similarities arise between their poetry and their poetry manifestoes, specifically in regards to their revolutionary forms of bodily space. Lawrence's 'Poetry of the Present' (1918) had proposed a new form of verse that would spontaneously enact the 'carnal self' and its 'plasm,' in order to capture the physical form of an always moving instant or present. Such poetics are displayed in Lawrence's collection *Pansies* (1928), where the form of the poem attends to the 'fragrance' of 'space' while its 'pansies' or '*pensées*' keep dying. In *Pansies*, Lawrence presents a narrative of his fading health and his reliance upon 'space' to revolutionise the poet's physical and social body, resurrecting the body from the mechanical ideologies of Western capitalism and its diseases. Lawrence's bodily poetics regarding 'space' in *Pansies*, and the form in which 'space' indents Lawrence's poems concerning 'Space,' appear as a near pastiche in Olson's 1949 poem, 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing'. The narrative of 'an Olson' follows the poet's corroding body, one killed by quantifiable 'time' but healed by physical 'space'. Not only will the narrative of Olson's poem seek the vital 'fragrance' of 'space' in order to suspend and reorient the fatal history of the poet's physical body, and that of Western expansionism, but the material form of the poem will be disrupted as it breathes, runs, sails and floats in the space upon the page.

Olson's essays and letters in 1949 and 1950 are more widely published than those written earlier, allowing the scholar closer access to Olson's already impassioned study of Lawrence. By 1950, a wide reading of Lawrence was well underway, but in 1950 there is a dramatic turn to Lawrence's poetry and associated criticism. Olson had already begun to tackle Lawrence's *oeuvre*, a reading list which includes, but is not limited to, *The Trespassers*, *The White Peacock*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 'Jimmy and the Desperate Woman,' 'Love Among the Haystacks,'

'The Flying Fish,' *The Lost Girl*, 'The Woman Who Rode Away,' *The Plumed Serpent*, *Mornings in Mexico*, *Etruscan Places*, *The Escaped Cock*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Movements in European History*, *Last Poems*, *Selected Poems*, and *Collected Poems*. Olson may favor Lawrence's prose at times, telling Creeley, for example, that *The Escaped Cock*, 'for my taste, is *perfect* (thinking fast, I don't know of a single syllable, there, out of place, eh?)',<sup>178</sup> but Olson appears to exceedingly focus on Lawrence's poetry during his 'Projective Verse' phase. Olson had studied Lawrence's *Selected Poems* by 1950, 'but wanted more,' notes Ralph Maud.<sup>179</sup> Knowing that Viking Press had published Lawrence's *Collected Poems* and *Last Poems*, Olson contacted Monroe Engel, a friend at Viking, on 22 January, 1950, and wrote, 'i should like very much to have all the poems of lawrence right now, and if by any odd chance there are copies of each of these in stock, or available, could you be so kind as to see that they are sent to me'.<sup>180</sup> When learning that a new *Collected Poems* would be published by Viking, Olson wrote to Engel the following month, 'say, if the collected lawrence poems is not yet assigned for editor, i have an idea'.<sup>181</sup> Unfortunately Olson did not get this 'textual job,' which he admitted 'would be a labor of love'.<sup>182</sup> In fact, when Olson found out Mark Schorer had obtained the position of editor for Lawrence's new *Collected Poems*, Olson wrote, 'i have now wept two nights straight over Schorer and the *Collected Poems*'.<sup>183</sup> Up through 1951 Olson was craving Lawrence's notes, manuscripts, lost paintings, and any unpublished criticism on Lawrence, declaring in a letter to Cid Corman in '51, 'And Lawrence is the only predecessor who can carry narrative ahead,' followed by a parenthetical, '((i would be interested, for example, to hear from you if *any* mss you have received shows *any* leaning fr Lawrence.))'.<sup>184</sup> Olson's twice-stipulated and twice-italicised '*any*' and '*any*' conveys a passionate accumulation of materials that Olson had just recently exhausted with Melville. However, Maud's bibliography omits the breadth and depth of Olson's readings of Lawrence, and simply notes in the 'Appendix' that Olson pursued studies of

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<sup>178</sup> Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, vol 8, p. 187

<sup>179</sup> Charles Olson's *Reading: A Biography*, p. 17.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>184</sup> Charles Olson, *Charles Olson & Cid Corman: Complete Correspondence, 1950-1964, Volume I* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1991), vol 1, p. 168.

Lawrence's poetry at a critical time, and 'that they were carried out simultaneously when Projective Verse was being written is significant'.<sup>185</sup> Such a context provides a frame for Olson's projective verse, which further correlates the poem's body with the page's space.

From 1944 to 1948, Olson proposed in *Ishmael* that Moby Dick was a search for a 'body' of 'Space,' and, in 'Man is Prospective,' Olson positioned 'man as object in space as against man as subject of time,' each of which bore a literal typography of space perhaps more concrete than the pronouncements therein. With the appearance of Olson's first poems in 1948, the page's space begins to tell a narrative of its own. The form of 'The Kingfishers' (1949) has represented Olson's grand entrance into poetry, but the page's space had also taken a specific form in his well-known 'post-modern' poem, 'La Préface' (1948).<sup>186</sup> The historical references in 'La Préface' have been prevalent entry points for Olson criticism, and the poem's concept of 'space' has been discussed but not the space upon its pages, which can once more introduce a vital body in Olson's poetics which Lawrence will inform. 'La Préface' was written in 1946, as a side installation for Corrado Cagli's Buchenwald drawings, and published subsequently in Olson's debut collection, *Y & X* (1948).<sup>187</sup> The post-WWII narrative is sickened by US imperialism and Nazi Germany, and the poem intervenes by proposing not to merely mourn the dead, but to see the dead bodies stretched out before us, irrevocably altering the view of history: 'The dead in via | in vita nuova | in the way'.<sup>188</sup> But how the dead and living bodies are to be visually seen is a bit undeveloped in criticism. David Herd rightly reads the poem as initiating Olson's 'open field poetics,' with 'lines and phrases being so placed as to hold their position virtually on the page'.<sup>189</sup> In suggesting an aesthetic turn, Herd turns to a concept of 'space' which offers resistance to history's racial violence by taking on a non-identity to address history: "'My name is NO RACE" address | Buchenwald new Altamira

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<sup>185</sup> Charles Olson's *Reading: A Biography*, p. 225.

<sup>186</sup> George Butterick, *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson: Excluding the 'Maximus' Poems* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), pp. xix. Butterick calls 'La Préface' Olson's 'first post-modern' poem.

<sup>187</sup> Charles Olson's *Reading: A Biography*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>188</sup> Ben Hickman, *Crisis and the U.S. Avant-Garde* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 75.

<sup>189</sup> David Herd, 'Open Field Poetics and the politics of movement,' in *Contemporary Olson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 274.

cave'.<sup>190</sup> Viewing the bodies of Buchenwald as if they were the cave paintings discovered in Spain's Altamira cave is an aesthetic critique of history proper, and Herd briefly quotes the poem as an indication of a general turn away from historical 'time' and 'into space': 'Put war away with time, come into space. | It was May, precise date, 1940. I had air my lungs could breathe'.<sup>191</sup> In a more clear political context, Herd finds only an incipient if not elusive concept of space in the poem, and quickly moves on to summarise the wider poetics of space in Olson's oeuvre. The poem's early aesthetic of space, however, should be read hieroglyphically, as an entire surface illustration upon a physically relevant medium rather than exclusively relying upon the poem's words.

'La Préface' attempts to rewrite modern history in one iconographic line, again presenting history with one glance: 'Draw it thus: (     ) 1910 (     )'.<sup>192</sup> Here space is not the background or a void for Olson's language, but is rather the object of attention. The icon of '1910' is the year of Olson's birth, but it is also Olson's date for the post-modern. History itself, therefore, appears as the figure situated between two forms of space. The line '(     ) 1910 (     )' replaces what would otherwise be a historical narrative of dates and statistics with literal blocks of space to form the event. Like Benjamin's 'Angel of History,' the '1910' looks back, but at a dead and closed-form of space (closed parentheses), while moving forward into an open-form (open parentheses). The poem's subsequent lines introduce the very space as tangible bodies, since the poet and Cagli 'put our hands to these dead'.<sup>193</sup> Olson then explains the image in the following lines:

The closed parenthesis reads: the dead bury the dead,  
and it is not very interesting.  
 Open, the figure stands at the door, horror his  
 and gone, possessed, o new Osiris, Odysseus ship.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 47.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

If we take these lines as a description of the aesthetic space in the line of 'Draw it thus,' then we may translate the first block of space, ' (       ) ', as the corpse of the past—'the dead who bury the dead,' while the spatial gap in the second explanatory line, the indented 'and it is not very interesting,' is not merely a pause for breath but a mirrored reflection of the '1910' above it. For just as the first and third lines in this explanatory stanza translate the two former blocks of space, so too is '1910' now translated as a block of space. Finally, the 'Open' parenthesis, '(       ', exposes the 'figure' who 'stands at the door': the subject of '1910'. Though the parenthesis or ink on the page could itself stand as a body peering out, ' ( ', the open door is filled with a space that the 'new Osiris' can step into and be corporeally reconstructed by, to sail the windy space like Odysseus's ship.

Textual forms of space are given a more sensible body through readings of Lawrence, which is best represented in Olson's 1950 essay, 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind'. Moreover, criticism's ostensible neglect of Olson's essays on Lawrence are symptomatic of a wider oversight, since Lawrence's fidelity to sensuality is held by Olson with such notable esteem. The essay introduces Lawrence as a Christ-like figure who can additionally resist a fourth temptation from the devil: the satisfying temptation of knowledge, conceptualisation, or that of the 'mind'. For Olson, Lawrence harnesses the conflict between transcendental knowledge and a body-consciousness, a conjoined conflict which Olson analogises as a race between the hare's rapid quantification and the tortoise's corporeal dilatoriness. Olson writes, 'It may be that the resistance I speak of as imbedded in Lawrence is merely a recognition that the tortoise of feeling has to be allowed to make his race, that a man cannot stay alive as man unless both the tortoise and the hare he is both run the course'.<sup>195</sup> The essay thus acknowledges Lawrence's intellectual speed, a Poundian trait, yet Olson sanctifies Lawrence's ability to work against it. The Lawrentian 'divergence of the path of the mind is only (to use an image Lawrence uses in reference to the crisis of our culture) an act of detour,' continues Olson, 'by which a man picks up that slower thing he cannot, at his peril, leave behind, no matter how fast a hare he be'.<sup>196</sup> Olson and Lawrence's shared detour, from the cultural

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<sup>195</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 136

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*



crisis of the modern mind, will be the way of the body. Olson's Laurentian act of critique here is then a two-fold sensation: a hyper-dialectic that resists the mind while the mind must still pick up 'that slower thing.'

In the essay Lawrence's sensible intentionality is 'archaic' but also 'prospective,' since he sustains a primordial sense of the bodily space to come, but by reflectively registering that very body. Olson continues:

The proposition, then, is this, that the act, the Laurentian act, is the answer to metaphysics, and its high temptation. What results, what the moral advantage is, is a thing both faster than the hare and slower than the tortoise, a combination both archiac and prospective, which gives man, in his preoccupation with life, the proper instrumentation for its understanding and use.<sup>197</sup>

The prospective 'instrumentation' is conveyed as an extended synthetic thing, but here the body is a living thing which makes sense of the world. Olson attributes this 'Laurentian act,' 'the answer to metaphysics,' to 'the discipline and health of form, organic form as distinguished from that false form which the arrangement of the intellect, in its false speed, offers'.<sup>198</sup> Teasing out the fine line he hopes to walk, Olson touches upon a dimension situated between the 'false speed' of the hare's intellectualism or rationale and the 'detour' of the tortoise's sense of motion or 'organic form'.

Olson's reading of Lawrence in 'High Temptation' is similar to Merleau-Ponty's opening chapter in *The Visible and the Invisible*, 'Reflection and Interrogation,' where reflection's transcendental and internalised objectivity is resisted by a bodily perception that is persistently interrogating the spatial objects outside itself, and yet reflection is critical for destroying the synchronisation of immanence and for recognising difference. As Francoise Dastur summarises in 'World, Flesh Vision,' 'in order to surmount the naïveté of the reflective operation that transforms the world into a noema and the subject

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

into pure thought, Merleau-Ponty calls for a hyper-reflection'.<sup>199</sup> The space of Olson's body is similarly between the mind's active quantification and the flesh's passive primitiveness. The betweenness is a space where the sensual satisfaction of the body can be recognised in its reflection of such a hyper-reflection after the temptation of 'mind' is reluctantly considered. Such a hyper-dialecticity resembles 'the Laurentian act,' which is a resistant act that is itself a sense of mental satisfaction:

I must, finally, offer one connection of the high temptation which is difficult to state (these days especially), but which is essential. It is the evidence of the connection between sex and the structure of the mind. When Lawrence, in one of his verses, calls the search for truth 'the profoundest of all sensualities' (he calls the search for justice 'the next deepest sensual experience'), he is recognizing the connection I am talking about. What is fine in his statement is, of course, that he is speaking of the satisfaction after the temptation has been resisted. But what I am here interested in, is the effects of sensuality (granting that it is to sensuality that thought is directly tied to), if the temptation is not resisted.<sup>200</sup>

Olson's emphasis on the 'sensuality' of 'thought' after the 'temptation is not resisted' must first move through the sensations of a resisted temptation, in order to invest in satisfaction from such. With these competing dynamics of a body-consciousness, the Lawrentian runner which Olson imagines running this ideal race is one who ought to remain torn within the sensible interstices of reflective knowledge, which is the 'one thing' that 'Lawrence knew, as no metaphysician ever does'.<sup>201</sup>

The tortoise trope of Olson's essay also seems derivative of Lawrence's Tortoise Poems, as Lawrence's six tortoise poems, published in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), seem preoccupied with the tortoise's 'slow' nature, which foresees and meditates upon the pain induced by its sexual connections. 'Tortoise Shell' and 'Tortoise Family Connections'

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<sup>199</sup> Francoise Dastur, 'World, Flesh Vision,' in *Chiasms*, ed by Fred Evans and Francis Taylor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 26.

<sup>200</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 136.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.

introduce the tortoise's body as a slowed interaction with the world, 'This slow one' that 'always foresee obstacles'.<sup>202</sup> In 'Tortoise Shout' Lawrence senses the tortoise's 'War-cry',<sup>203</sup> 'till the last plasm of my body was melted back | To the primeval rudiments of life, and the secret'.<sup>204</sup> Robert E. Montgomery has compared Lawrence's Tortoise Poems to Coleridge's maxim in *Biographia*, that 'Sensation itself is but vision nascent'.<sup>205</sup> But the poet's vision of the tortoise's orgasmic cry in 'Tortoise Shout' is a projection of the poet's own aching grief, as the poem 'Lui et Elle,' placed between 'Tortoise Shout and 'Tortoise Family Connections,' implicates Lawrence's sexual affair with Rosalind Baynes during his unofficial honeymoon with Frieda. The tortoise's cry, in other words, reflects upon the body's disconnection from its other half (Frieda, or Rosalind), yet the body's attempt to fully consummate itself only reflects its painful state of lack. 'Lui et Elle' describes a 'large and matronly' female tortoise and a smaller male, a resemblance Frieda immediately rebuked, and 'the farcical male' refers to Lawrence, who, John Worthen notes, is doomed and cries out from the death which sex has brought.<sup>206</sup> In 'Tortoise Gallantry,' Lawrence writes, 'Only he senses the vulnerable folds of skin | That work beneath her while she sprawls along | In her ungainly pace,' and yet one's being is 'doomed to partiality, partial being | Ache, and want of being, | Want, | Self-exposure, hard humiliation, need to add himself on to | her'.<sup>207</sup> The 'ungainly pace' is sensed in 'the vulnerable fold of skin,' but this pleasurable, clumsy trekking through the reflection of one's body is itself a touch of the tortoise's 'Want'. The poems therefore resemble Aristophanes's speech on the role of 'Love' in *The Symposium*, where the physically severed man remains in his torn state because he cannot fully admit his need for bodily unification with woman. The Tortoise Poems are similarly caught between the tortoise's sensual exultation and the poet's disturbed introspection, a domain of burdened sensuality that speaks to Olson's 'High Temptation,' where Lawrence is the real suffering Christ who reveals a truth, that the sense of satisfaction is conceptualised in resisting the temptations

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<sup>202</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 356.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p. 364.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, p. 365.

<sup>205</sup> Robert E. Montgomery, *The Visionary D.H. Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 190.

<sup>206</sup> John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 234.

<sup>207</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 362.

of either mind or body. The orgasmic cry in 'Tortoise Shout' is likened to Christ's forsaken death-cry upon the cross, where the cloven body yearns for wholeness:

The same cry from the tortoise as from Christ, the Osiris-  
cry of abandonment,  
That which is whole, torn asunder,  
That which is in part, finding its whole again throughout  
the universe.<sup>208</sup>

Like Olson's tortoise, an orgasmic satisfaction is reached only when one can reflect upon that slower, painful thing, which cries out for impossible notions of ideality. More importantly, it is the tortoise's foreclosed 'secret,' hidden in its natural form, which the poet's mind must try to occupy itself with throughout the race at hand.

Olson's 'High Temptation' wrestled with a truth procedure that was ultimately both 'faster than the hare and slower than the tortoise,' and Olson himself can be seen trying to run this race in his poem 'Help Me, Venus, You Who Led Me On'. The poem was written alongside 'High Temptation' and 'Projective Verse,'<sup>209</sup> and the sexual relationships which Olson carried out at that time are not so unlike Lawrence's, for Olson had begun an intimate correspondence with Frances Boldereff while married to Connie. Like Lawrence's painful return to Frieda, Maud notes that 'Help Me Venus' refers to Olson's first poem to Connie, 'Atalanta,'<sup>210</sup> perhaps in an attempt for reconciliation. 'Help Me Venus' tries to handle both the 'hare' and the 'tortoise,' while the poet's sexual being is wrenched in chasing nature's 'secret'. I quote the poem in full:

if you would guess, fond man, the secret,  
propose to say why your beloved's foot still flashes,  
in your face still flashes, still

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, pp. 366-367.

<sup>209</sup> Andrew Mossin, *Male Subjectivity and Poetic Form in 'New' American Poetry* (London: Palgrave, 2010), p. 60.

<sup>210</sup> Ralph Maud, 'Tom Clarke on the Olson-Boldereff "riot"'.  
<http://www.charlesolson.org/Files/riot.htm>.

is fire upon your face, still  
doth stir the root

If on this course, as she is, as she runs, as she too looks for love,  
as she, a daughter, seeks a lover,  
forever seeks the lover worthy to undo the obdurate father

If, as she leads you, as she outruns you in this racing,  
as you pursue both her and some more stubborn, abstract tracing,  
you who go as tortoise and as hare do,  
as you, slow, in search for source, and then so quickly furious

If you and she both race uncertain,  
palpably uncertain, as the issue is, as,  
because you both are, not as nature is, as  
man and woman forever is—

Then, man, can you allow  
your own bold eye to fall  
the least point off, in this full running, off  
this silver girl

Can you, who makes this race, or loses  
who, must follow after or  
be lost, resist  
the inward tender of  
these flying feet?

Can you, or you,  
when man runs, when woman runs, when both of you are racing  
as man and woman forever is,

with what differences,

And love

the only likeness? <sup>211</sup>

The repeating 'if' and 'as' and 'is' throughout the poem create a pace for a race which looks back as it leaps forward, holding the piece together. Olson's opening apostrophe, 'If you would guess,' addresses the reader, a 'fond man' pursuing the unknown secret through the beloved. The rushed, unpunctuated and increasingly shorter lines of the first quintain, and the stalling yet ruptured enjambments of 'secret,' 'flashes,' 'still,' 'still,' and 'root,' introduce both the quickening yet slowed pace of comprehension. But the poetic form expresses some of the truth that escapes symbolisation, as the alliteration of the 's' (guess, secret, say, still, still, still, is, stir) counters the 'f' (if, fond, foot, flashes, face, flashes, fire, face), and combines in 'f-lashe-'s' as one's quickened 'foot' takes 'root' in what was once 'the secret'.

In the second stanza, the anti-strophe of an ode-like form withholds its second-person imperatives found in the first stanza, while quickening the narration for a three-line stanza. But the three-lines stretch out again to slow the reading for the extended quatrain below. In the third stanza Olson quotes from 'High Temptation,' where the 'tortoise' and the 'hare' run the race for an Edenic 'source'. The masculine tortoise is cautiously 'slow' in pursuing the feminine hare, in a vain return where the real is perhaps traced in the 'uncertain' pursuit itself. The uncertainty is shared in form, as the last three stanzas transform the 'you' who *was* the 'fond man' into a 'you' who *is* the viewer of that fond man and woman, disjoining you from the race and yet including the reader through the reader's perception. Evoking 'the Laurentian act,' which grips the intellect of bodily form, the poem asks: 'Can you, or you' too 'resist | the inward tender of | these flying feet?' The poem's closing fragmentation seems satisfied with obscurity, for we are left with a question whether the opacity of 'love' is itself 'the only likeness' to such a hyper-dialectical race for meaning, or whether that very 'likeness' should itself be loved? A question that cannot fathom its answer.

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<sup>211</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 163.

Lawrence and Olson each appear to position the body in a certain frictional relationship to linear 'time', whether it be a historical past or an ideal future, and Lawrence's and Olson's poetry manifestoes each correlate the body's novel sense of a present with literary form. The closest Lawrence came to writing a poetry manifesto was 'Poetry of the Present' (1918), written as an Introduction to the American Edition of *New Poems* (1920). As Maud recorded, Olson owned Lawrence's *Selected Poems*, knew *The Collected Poems* and *Last Poems*, and later purchased the three-volume Phoenix Edition of *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*. Lines from Lawrence's *The Escaped Cock* sneak into Olson's later essay, 'The Present Is Prologue' (1952), but 'Projective Verse' had already aligned with Lawrence's 'Poetry of the Present' in 1950. Lawrence's essay attempted to move beyond *vers libre* by arguing for a form that may enact the 'instant'.

'Poetry of the Present' first dispels the crystalised past of classical poetry and the 'glimmering futurity' of romanticism. 'From the foregoing it is obvious that the poetry of the instant present cannot have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after,' writes Lawrence.<sup>212</sup> The essay redundantly states that changes in poetry should sense 'the immediate present,' where 'there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished'.<sup>213</sup> To do so, the natural yet 'unknown' body must be the sensor and form in which poem's 'instant' is held. Lawrence finds the 'quick of Time' and the 'present' in bird's song, in the 'intermingling web' where 'the waters are shaking the moon,' or 'the heavy, silting, sucking mud, the spinning sky winds,' yet whatever 'strands are all flying' are part of the 'living plasm' or 'living tissue'.<sup>214</sup> Lawrence writes, 'The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither,' but 'If we try to fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formalin, we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation'.<sup>215</sup> The living space of Lawrence's 'Poetry of the Present' is blown into outer space and encapsulated within the oxygenated cells pulsating in one's veins: 'The quick of the universe is the *pulsating, carnal self*, mysterious and palpable'.<sup>216</sup> The 'present,' in other

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<sup>212</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 184

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, p. 183.

words, exists when the whole body organically embodies its external atmosphere, just as the poem shall.

Lawrence proposed form should lack structure, except in its exposure to such a pulsating and palpable space: 'Give me nothing fixed, set, static'.<sup>217</sup> The pulse is vital for Lawrence's living plasm, reduced to neither technique nor mechanics. Whitman had provided a model for what 'free verse' could achieve, but Lawrence found that even the musical rhythm of free-verse is too constricted, for 'we cannot positively prescribe any motion, any rhythm,' since any scheme 'will only apply to some form of restricted, limited unfree verse'.<sup>218</sup> When transitioning into his own assertions, Lawrence employs descriptors of corporeality: 'To break the lovely form of metrical verse, and to dish up the fragments as a new substance, called *vers libre*, this is what most of the free-versifiers accomplish. They do not know that free verse has its own *nature*, that it is neither star nor pearl, but instantaneous like plasm'.<sup>219</sup> Lawrence's 'plasm' has its own sounds and movement: 'The utterance is like a spasm, naked contact with all influences at once,'<sup>220</sup> and such a 'naked throb of the instant moment' is 'the rare new poetry':

One realm we have never conquered: the pure present. One great mystery of time is terra incognita to us: the instant. The most superb mystery we have hardly recognised: the immediate, instant self. The quick of all time is the instant. The quick of all the universe, of all creation, is the incarnate, carnal self.<sup>221</sup>

More specifically, Lawrence relates the pulse of the present as the sound of discord to the trained ear, since the 'direct utterance from the instant' comes from 'the soul and the mind and the body surging at once,' which causes 'some confusion, some discord'.<sup>222</sup> Such cosmic surging interrupts the mind like a body of water, for 'confusion and the discord

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, p. 184.



only belong to the reality as noise belongs to the plunge of water'.<sup>223</sup> In addressing an American audience, Lawrence sets Whitman's free-verse as a stepping-stone, pushing the movement of fleshly space as both poetry's content and form, in order to enact change 'instant' by 'instant'.

Olson's 'Projective Verse' proposes a similar 'OPEN verse' with three main attributes. The first, Olson writes, is '(1) the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it [and] the poem itself must, at all points, be a high-energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge'.<sup>224</sup> Like Lawrence, Olson primarily seeks a new dynamic that requires the poet to instantaneously put forward 'the energy which propelled him'.<sup>225</sup> And, like Lawrence, this can be done 'by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares, for itself. Thus he has to behave, and be, instant by instant, aware of some several forces just now beginning to be examined'.<sup>226</sup> Echoing Lawrence's skepticism of Pound's lyrical canzone, Olson writes, 'It is much more, for example, this push, than simply such a one as Pound put, so wisely, to get us started: "the musical phrase"'.<sup>227</sup> Olson's second attribute is taken from Creeley: '(2) is the principle' where 'FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT'.<sup>228</sup> As clichéd as this mantra has become for critics and later poets, Lawrence's 'carnal self' gives new context, as the body provides form for the poem's plasmic 'universe' and 'the immediate, instant'.<sup>229</sup> Lawrence's 'instant' comes through in Olson's third attribute, '(3) the *process* of the thing,' which takes the motto from Edward Dahlberg, the other confessed Lawrentian and early mentor of Olson: 'ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION,' and 'must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!'<sup>230</sup> The command resonates back through Lawrence's 'Poetry of the Present,' where Lawrence demands that the poem not fixate upon where a bird flies to or from, but rather observes flight as a constant, electrical and physical change of direction: 'The bird is on the wing in

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 240.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 185.

<sup>230</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 240.

the winds, flexible to every breath, a living spark in the storm, its very flickering depending upon its supreme mutability and power of change'.<sup>231</sup> Olson's similar employment of 'perception' relates to the perception of such electrical forces as the poem's 'breath,' a form which, in Olson's 'INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER,' gains additional sensitivity in Lawrence's 'instant by instant'. Olson defines such 'perception' in 'Projective Verse' by labeling it 'the Boss of all, the "Single Intelligence,"' a term Olson and Creeley often used from 1950 to 1952 when conveying a physical sensitivity, as seen in Olson's 'The Materials and Weights of Herman Melville' (1952), where Olson rebuked historical or autobiographical embellishments and prescribed a tactile handling of the text, an 'application of intelligence to all phenomena as *the* ordering agent—what Creeley and I have elsewhere called the Single Intelligence,' which is indicative of 'the man who more and more stands up as the one man of this century,' for the one 'to take on the post-modern is D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>232</sup>

'Projective Verse' critiques various examples, from Chaucer to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, from Hart Crane to Cummings, but the only excerpt from Olson's own poetry is a stanza from 'The Praises'. The quoted stanza is an example of various poetics intersecting, but they do so around the motility of typed 'space' upon the page. Olson first introduces the purpose of typographical 'space' in poetry: 'If a contemporary poet leaves a space as long as the phrase before it, he means that space to be held, by the breath,' or if space ends a line, 'he means that time to pass' before the eye 'picks up the next line,' or if the poet 'wishes a pause so light it hardly separates the words,' then 'follow him when he uses a symbol the typewriter has ready to hand'.<sup>233</sup> Like Lawrence, each of Olson's examples use a bodily language or taxonomy to describe the reader's perception of space: 'breath,' 'picks up,' 'follow,' 'to hand'. The potential of the typewriter is Olson's key example of the poem's physical and spontaneous 'interruption of meaning,' an interruption which enables in the form of 'space' (i.e. spacebar or carriage return). The following stanza from 'The Praises' does indeed exhibit thought as a linguistic structure, yet the space forming the lines cannot be reduced to mood, breath or syllabic rhythm. Rather, 'space' seems to define the stanza's sensual 'act':

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> *Collected Prose*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 245.

Sd he:

to dream takes no effort

to think is easy

to act is more difficult

but for a man to act after he has taken thought, this!

is the most difficult thing of all <sup>234</sup>

While the first four lines step forward, the penultimate draws back in a resistant 'act,' forming a half-circle of thought. The material and aesthetic work of space here highlights the page's typographical mobility, a spatial form of the 'he' coming through in the gesturing or physical riposte of thought. More to the point, there is also some satisfaction to be had, since physically resisting the progress of such a 'High Temptation' is 'the most difficult thing of all'.

Lawrence's manifestoes continued to propose a bodily perception as poetic form. His 'Introduction' to *Pansies* (1929) had attempted to hold 'thought' itself as a physical form. Robert Duncan noticed Olson's preference for Lawrence's 'later poems,'<sup>235</sup> and *Pansies* sheds further light on Olson's 1950 poetic. In the 'Introduction to Pansies' Lawrence describes thinking as perception, and perception as gripping thoughts. Lawrence writes, 'This little bunch of fragments is offered as a bunch of *pensées*, anglicé pansies; a handful of thoughts,'<sup>236</sup> as 'each little piece is a thought; not a bare idea or opinion or a didactic statement,' but a 'thought, with its own blood of emotion and instinct'.<sup>237</sup> In analogising *pensées* with pansies, the poem perceives thought as physical, but in analogising pansies with poems, it is the page which handles the thought. Such an extension of the body, to that of form, offers the flower's fragrance to the poem's multiple senses. Similar to 'Poetry of the Present,' Lawrence takes issue with neo-Kantianism in poetry, as Lawrence's 'handful of thoughts' are 'thoughts which run through the modern

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<sup>234</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 246.

<sup>235</sup> Ann Charters, 'Introduction,' in *A Special View of History* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1970), p. 10

<sup>236</sup> The French word for the English [*Anglice*] should not have an accent mark, though Lawrence writes 'anglicé'.

<sup>237</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 417.

mind and body, each having its own separate existence, yet each of them combining with all others to make up a complete state of mind'.<sup>238</sup> The 'state of mind' is not complete in bridging the mind-body dualism alone, but in opening up a bodily form: 'We have roots, and our roots are in the sensual, instinctive and intuitive body, and it is here we need fresh air of open consciousness'.<sup>239</sup> Lawrence's 'fresh air' is the aroma of pansies, but it is also a metaphor for what his sexual and naked poems offer, since the essay is largely criticising the recent charges of obscenity against him, his 'obscene' words. The 'Introduction' quite literally proposes that the word 'arse' or 'shit' may break open the 'modern mind' and its 'taboo-insanity'.<sup>240</sup> Though *Pansies* is not particularly 'obscene,' its political defiance against conventional 'fear-associations' will treat poetic form as if it were a combatant body waving a fistful of 'unclean' but sweet-smelling pansies.

A 'Foreword' for *Pansies* was written soon after the 'Introduction' and speaks more directly to Lawrence's need to resurrect both his dying body and the social body of modernity, which the fragrance exfoliating from his 'pansies' hopes to accomplish. The 'fragrance' that would revolutionise Lawrence's health and modern politics is a physical form of space that Lawrence saw as a vital catalyst for bodily motion. The natural sensuousness of space, as *Pansies* presents it, guides and heals man's sickly, mechanised form. The 'fragrance' of *Pansies* is also the sense of the 'instant,' since the scented 'breath of the moment' stems from the flower's constant life-cycle, which cannot be bound by any poetic schema:

A flower passes, and that perhaps is the best of it. If we can take it in its transience, its breath, its maybe mephistophelian, maybe palely ophelian face, the look it gives, the gesture of its full bloom, and the way it turns upon us to depart—that was the flower, we have had it, and no *immortelle* can give us anything in comparison. The same with the pansy poems; merely the breath of the moment, and one eternal moment easily

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, p. 418.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 420.

contradicting the next eternal moment. Only don't nail the pansy down.  
You won't keep it any better if you do.<sup>241</sup>

Alluding to a Baudelairean modernity, in which a decadent aesthetic or transitory surface simultaneously invokes the eternal, Lawrence perceives a vital space in the poem, which holds the wafted remains of a fleeting flower, or the body of thought. Portraying characteristics found in Olson's 'This Is Yeats Speaking,' Lawrence appeals to a Goethian science and to Yeats's 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time,'<sup>242</sup> and, in intertwining the 'breath of the moment' to the 'tissues' and 'plasm' of the poem, the collection hopes to revive a social body.

*Pansies* is overtly political, correlating its bodily resurrection with the masses. The collection shows its political face in poems such as 'Why': 'Why have money? | why have a financial system to strangle us all in its octopus arms? | why have industry?'<sup>243</sup> Lawrence continued to see modern industry as a symptom of the ego, idealism, and repressed sexuality, and it was not an emotive poetry that would enliven the social body but a sensual resistance against the formation of an ego. Poems like 'O! Start A Revolution' are further detailed by poems like 'Climb Down, I Lordly Mind' and 'Ego-Bound,' where 'As a plant becomes pot-bound | man becomes ego-bound | enclosed in his own limited mental consciousness'.<sup>244</sup> Even 'Cerebral Emotion' proclaims, 'I am sick of people's cerebral emotions | that are born in the minds and forced down by the will | on to their poor deranged bodies'.<sup>245</sup> Starting from the body, Lawrence will work from the ground up. The pulsating and breathing plasm in *Pansies* leans on an Einsteinian relativity and atomism yet avoids scientific logic to break apart cognitive coherence. In poems such as 'Relativity,' Lawrence refuses to solidify modern conceptions of atomism by appealing to a more unknown 'space,' which moves the body as it does poetic form, observed in its indentation:

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 424.

<sup>242</sup> W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Vintage, 1990), p. 27. 'Come near, come near, come near— Ah, leave me still | A little space for the rose-breath to fill!'

<sup>243</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 451.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 474.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 500.

I like relativity and quantum theories  
because I don't understand them  
and they make me feel as if space shifted  
about like a swan that can't settle,  
refusing to sit still and be measured;  
and as if the atom were an impulsive thing  
always changing the mind.<sup>246</sup>

The indentation marks a 'space' that has 'shifted' its physical form of conceptualisation, rendering atomic space 'an impulsive thing | always changing the mind'. Among the political uprisings of *Pansies*, the dynamism of 'space' becomes the catalyst for an *élan vital*, 'as if space shifted.'

*Pansies* gives meaning to the inhabitation of space, since space has the capacity to halt modernisation and suspend egoic violence. In poems like 'Be Still!' Lawrence is adamant that once the mind is interrupted, the body can reform: 'The only thing to be done, now, | now that the waves of our undoing have begun to strike | on us, | is to contain ourselves,' and 'Among all the smashed debris of myself | keep quiet, and wait. | For the word is Resurrection'.<sup>247</sup> 'Be Still!' is a preliminary imperative for subsequent poems like 'The Death of Our Era,' which finds 'space' to be the very substance which continually strikes the 'bell' and rings the 'knell,' shattering 'mechanised' consciousness with spatial 'vibrations'. I quote in full:

Our era is dying  
yet who has killed it?  
Have we, who are it?

In the middle of voluted space  
its knell has struck.

And in the middle of every atom, which is the same thing,

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<sup>246</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 524.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 513-514.

a tiny bell of conclusion has sounded.

The curfew of our great day  
the passing-bell of our way of knowing  
the knell of our bald-headed consciousness  
the toscin of this our civilisation.

Who has struck the bell?  
Who has rang the knell?  
Not I, not you,  
yet all of us.

At the core of space the final knell  
of our era has struck, and it chimes  
in terrible rippling circles between the stars  
till it reaches us, and its vibrations shatter us  
each time they touch us.

And they keep on coming, with greater force  
striking us, the vibrations of our finish.

And all that we can do  
is to die the amazing death  
with every stroke, and go on  
till we are blank

And yet, as we die, why should not our vast mechanised  
day die with us,  
so that when we are re-born, we can be born into a fresh  
world.

For the new word is Resurrection.<sup>248</sup>

'Space' is the agent shattering the mechanised world, killing the self for a 'fresh world' in the resurrected body. The poem starts in a tightly bound free-verse but shifts after the 'greater force' of 'space' begins recreation. The closing indentions and final leap into the last line catch the shattered movement of a form both crumbling and becoming the matter of space. 'The Death of Our Era' introduces the serialised theme of 'space,' as following poems like 'Space' locate 'space' as the original form of resurrection:

Space, of course, is alive  
that's why it moves about;  
and that's what makes it eternally spacious and unstuffy.

And somewhere it has a wild heart  
that send pulses even through me;  
and I call it the sun;  
and I feel aristocratic, noble, when I feel a pulse go  
through me  
from the wild heart of space, that I call the sun of suns.<sup>249</sup>

Lawrence's revolutionary body may seem masculine, yet it is 'space' which does the striking. And by calling 'Space' the 'sun of suns,' *Pansies* can then shape poems such as 'Sun-Men' and 'Sun-Women,' tropes which correspond with Lawrence's other 1929 work, *The Man Who Died*. In the novella, 'sunshine' is the flowery 'touch' of 'Space,' whose 'perfume' envelopes Christ and Isis as separate particles, together embodied by 'the great rose of Space':

How it leans around me, and I am part of it, the great rose of Space. I am  
like a grain of its perfume, and the woman is a grain of its beauty. Now the

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 512.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, p. 525.



world is one flower of many petalled darknesses, and I am in its perfume  
as in a touch.<sup>250</sup>

Man and woman are both 'grains' in an intrataurine 'Space,' as if 'in a touch'. The 'rose of Space' encapsulates, embodies, and restores the masculine and feminine body. In the poem 'Space,' the form of 'space' is again presented by the poem's indentation, as found in 'Relativity' and 'The Death of Our Era'. In not only making bodily space the content of poetic revitalisation, but in presenting the body of space as a physical form upon the page, 'Space' intends to materialise a critique of modern idealism (capitalism, industrialism, egoism) through the vitalised body of poetic form.

Such a materialist reading of 'space' is not common in Olson criticism. For example, Reitha Pattison's recent thesis in *Contemporary Olson* ultimately conceived Olson's inconsistent use of 'space' as a void, despite Olson's occasional intentions to avoid such conclusions.<sup>251</sup> Pattison entitled her chapter, "Empty Air': Charles Olson's cosmology,' after Anne Charters's concluding remark that the term 'space' in *Ishmael* was 'used in such varied contexts that any precise meaning evaporates, leaving the reader holding onto... empty space'.<sup>252</sup> Pattison presents Olson's own counter-arguments, as found in *The Special View of History*, where Olson stated that old cosmologies where Space was a Void are a 'drag',<sup>253</sup> but Pattison concludes that despite Olson presenting 'space' as a material to breathe in at times (times mostly occurring during Olson's readings of Whitehead), Olson also returns to an 'empty space' after his Whitehead period.<sup>254</sup> Pattison cites Olson's 1946 poem, 'Mouths Biting Empty Air,' but then quotes from Olson's 1950 'ABCs (3—for Rimbaud),' to infer the emptiness of space. 'ABCs (3—for Rimbaud)' reads:

To have what back? Is it any more than  
a matter of

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<sup>250</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 208.

<sup>251</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 60.

<sup>252</sup> *Olson/Melville: A Study of Affinity*, p. 49

<sup>253</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 56.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

syllables?

Yes, mouths bit  
empty air

They bit. What  
do they bite,  
now? [...] <sup>255</sup>

The derivations in this poem are helpful in reinterpreting it. The line, 'Yes, mouths bit | empty air,' looks back with a simple-past tense to Pound's 'The Return,' where the hunting 'hounds' were 'sniffing the trace of air'.<sup>256</sup> Pound's 1912 poem stresses the 'Movements, and the slow feet' of the hunters, introducing Pound's fixity upon an absolute metrical and lyrical cadence 'slow feet'), but 'The Return' also disturbs this slow progress, as he wrote: 'The trouble in the pace and the uncertain | Wavering!' In 'The Return,' it is the air which has both the scent of blood and pushes these 'feet' around. The gesture of Olson's poem seems to capture a sharp and wavering step from Pound to Lawrence. The phrase 'empty air' is nevertheless quite ambiguous in Olson's stanza, for air is empty, but empty of what? The term 'empty air' does not denote a space that is empty of air, like a vacuum or void, but a space completely filled with 'air' yet lacking symbols, objects or knowledge, indicated by its lack of letters and syllables. The poem's argument is not so clear, for the question, 'Is [the form of air] any more than a matter of syllables?' does not lead to a rhetorical *No* but to a rhetorical 'Yes,' and after witnessing the syllabic biting of 'empty air'—for 'they bit'—Olson turns the table: 'What do they bite now?' The very critique of empty air seems to fill it with substance. If Olson does not clarify what is being bitten, if not syllables, then the physicality of the page's space appears more to be that which would support or hold syllables—how else does form move in biting? This question is taken up quite literally by its sister poem, 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing'. In, 'The Story of an Olson,' it is the 'time' of quantifiable (syllabic) discourse which 'bites'

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>256</sup> Pound, 'The Return', in *The New Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. by Harriet Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 20.

and eats the physical body, and it is explicitly the physical and material force of 'space' that heals and redirects the doomed body of poetic form.

In 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing,' Olson's own dying body is attributed to the violence of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and a disease of the 'brains,' as in *Pansies*, and it is the form and fragrance of 'space' that will force the poet's bodily resurrection and social revolution. 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing' was written in early June, 1950, published in *Origin* 1 (Spring 1951), accompanying Olson's readings of Lawrence's poetry, Olson's 'High Temptation' and 'Projective Verse'. Thomas Merrill notes that 'The Story' was one 'of Olson's major preoccupations' at the time, and observes that the poem's 'obedience' to the concept of 'space' hails from *Ishmael* and soon comprises Olson's 'Projective Verse'.<sup>257</sup> The 'Bad Thing' inside 'The Story' has connoted 'time' itself for critics, and 'time' is the 'enemy' which arrives at night to eat the heart and intestines, but such maladies are remedied by the flowery 'fragrance' of 'space'. Merrill also reads the poem's notion of 'space' coming straight out of Olson's 'Man is Prospective' (1948). Merrill writes: 'Here, again, Olson voices his confidence in space that promises, "in antithesis to time, secrets of a humanitas eased out of contemporary narrows"'.<sup>258</sup> Late in the poem, Olson specifically cites 'the easing of space' as a primary defense against 'Bad Thing'. The poem will posit space as a living, sensual substance which restores and moves Olson's life-history through the form of the poem.

Like Lawrence, 'an Olson' senses space through its 'fragrance,' in order to eventually embody a form of space. Olson begins 'The Story' by referring to his lineage and his Father's death, 'So I live, by warning, in daily fear I'll not break down by the nerves, as my fellows do, but by, as he did, the blood vessels, by the breaking of, where the fragrance is'.<sup>259</sup> Fearing his paternal history, Olson invokes 'Man is Prospective' and *Ishmael*, where he stated that quantified 'time is turned into space,' and instead the poet reaches for life by running in and breath in 'space,' 'in the running, breath, breath'.<sup>260</sup> Though Olson's father was eaten away, Olson regroups:

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<sup>257</sup> Thomas Merrill, *The Poetry of Charles Olson: A Primer* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Press, 1982), p. 201.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 176.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

And yet I don't believe I shall repeat him, if for no other reason than,  
that I dare not, that I must not (the way my time is quantitative and  
must, thus, be turned into space) I must not break, must, somehow,  
haul myself up eighty years, god damn these reeds on which men stand.  
[...]

Stamina, that's what isn't, not intelligence. It wasn't only stupidity  
the creator damned the race with. It was the shortness of life (what Bad  
Thing feeds on, knows how to nibble at). And that which we go by  
in the running, breath, breath, which can, as the flesh can, give off  
the odor of, same flowers.<sup>261</sup>

As found throughout the poem, quantifiable time is that which consumes life, and his  
'intelligence' cannot save it. Only through that 'flesh' which transmutes through the 'order'  
of 'same flowers' can the poet's body be recuperated like Lawrence's.

Similar to Lawrence, a sensitivity to space has immediate social and historical  
impacts. In Olson's 'The Story,' space's defense against the mechanics of time's bite is  
perceived as a resistance to economic expansionism or colonialism. Following from the  
above quotation, 'Part 2' of the 'The Story' relates the enemy of Time to the capitalisation  
of the frontier: '(after christianity, thus [...] the methodology | the fast buck: | kill, kill!'.<sup>262</sup>  
To deter such ventures, the poem seeks to fill the blood-vessels with 'space,' in order to  
overturn the 'Vessels' of industry: 'It takes blood, my fellow cits., even to the breaking of  
vessels! | (Vessels!)'.<sup>263</sup> The narrator of the poem becomes a figure like Natty Bumppo, as  
he 'dressed himself in doeskin, and went trading among distant tribes, went looking for a  
place where people are still natives, and where human business is still business,' rather  
than exploitation. Such is the search for a calming 'sleep,' 'the easing of space,' and the  
form of change.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 176.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, p. 177.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*.

The narrative of the poem will unchain the violence of Western industry and syntax as the poem's form begins to rest and saturate itself in 'space'. Olson continues, 'see if you can find the ease, see if I | can find you, in your life, moving, as though I were a sea-horse'.<sup>265</sup> Olson's seahorse is also a 'sea-horse,' a beast not normally put to sea, yet the 'sea-horse' floats in an ocean as in space. The seahorse is also a male that can undergo a sex reversal, for 'The Story' moves along by accounting for this 'olson male' who then becomes 'double,' 'multiple,' 'as a man, or a woman'. The poem's form then becomes a body resting in an ocean of space, progressively swimming, floating or being pulled forward through the page's space, as it follows space's 'fragrance':

because I am, because, god damn it, an olson male is  
a double

multiple, he sd, as a man, or a woman  
is (is a woman) is  
when they resist, when they let sleep  
that dog with the whitest, sharpest teeth

the temptation, which didn't get into the biblums  
that is, into them so far, that is, as I knows them,

of the brains, which always, always wants  
what it can't have because they ain't

Answers, I mean,  
which have no smell at all <sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 178.

Each 'Part' of the poem develops a narrative where the stanzas incrementally resist structured verse or 'the brains'. Here these demanding 'brains' do not have the 'Answers,' nor the ability to 'smell' space.

The poem's body becomes increasingly saturated by 'space' as the physical space of the page further pushes and redirects the poem's narrative and form. Employing Lawrence's prospection, 'Part 4' of the poem navigates space with 'the single intelligence,' where the lines increasingly break away from paragraph structure and slowly shift to the right-hand side of the page. The subject's 'nose' and corresponding body form the sails by which an organic intelligence can travel through the textual field. The once dying body is now breathing, running, swimming and sailing in space, escaping the 'teeth' of 'time,' the syllabic and historic bite of Western language and narrative, and is drifting past the brain's malignant 'antsirs' or 'facts':

And why we ain't  
spiritchool

And why there ain't  
antsirs

And why we damn well have to go  
by the nose  
(what nose?)

Why the whys are, in fact  
(last night, as I sd, he nipped me)  
because they are facts, they are only  
clues:

It is clews, clews that keep  
sail taut. Drama  
is out of business, tears,

tears/ Ships, ships, it's  
steering now that is, it is  
the biz-i-ness NOW, you  
who care, who can  
endure, it's  
"bring the head 'round, keep  
the wind, citizen!

(is it not the wind we obey, are  
kept by?

as good a word as any is the SINGLE INTELLIGENCE <sup>267</sup>

Though the poem's form intends to keep its 'sails taut,' Olson rhetorically asks, 'is it not the wind we obey,' since this radicalised body of citizens does obey its unfolding sense of space, though not a governing wind that remains external and unable to rest. And like Lawrence, who found the violence of industry and capital to be a symptom of modernity's egoic negligence of bodily space, so too does 'an olson' propose that the 'white man' and 'the l'univers concentrationnaire' is a 'business' that an enlivened sense of 'space' can break up, to promote a human 'biz-i-ness NOW'. The poem's own mapping of bodily space is a course set by none other than 'the SINGLE INTELLIGENCE' of 'Projective Verse,' wherein space is not merely the breath of the author, or the negation of ink, but a physical force being registered by the sails of a revolutionised form, i.e. the wind: 'bring the head "round, keep | the wind, citizen!"". Olson's poem and his 'citizen' come to embody Lawrence's fragrance of space, which 'an Olson' conclusively calls the 'flesh, rose flesh':

I, an olson

in the l'univers concentrationnaire the flesh

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

(is it not extraordinary that, when a wound  
is healing, we call, what it throws off, proud  
flesh?) flesh, rose flesh

must also be thrown in.<sup>268</sup>

Olson's fidelity to 'rose flesh' is conveyed in the poem's growing commitment to the 'fragrance' of 'space' and to the body's 'single intelligence'. The tropes and motif of the Olson's poem make several allusions to Lawrence, and Olson's passionate readings of Lawrence's poetry in 1949 and 1950 call for such readings. A preeminent characteristic, emerging and working in Olson's formative poetics, however, is the form in which a sensible space is working upon the page. This version of open-form or 'open verse' poetics attends to the form's open sense of space upon the page, while also reflecting upon such experiences within the history and language of the poem.

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.



## 'Between Things' in *The Escaped Cock*

1950-1952

When Olson was hired by Black Mountain College in 1951, his interdisciplinary enthusiasm would be accommodated and encouraged. He immediately partook in the college's ballet, art and literary scenes, and the joint faculty would soon share an artistic vision of the 'haptic'. At Black Mountain, the haptical form of art sought to dismantle distinctions between 'sense and medium,' writes Helen Molesworth, as seen in Anni Albers's pictorial weavings, John Cage's piano performances, Josef Albers's optical illusions, and Aaron Siskind's textural photography.<sup>269</sup> Each praxis was a 'move into the realm of proprioception,' a form expressed in Olson's late piece 'Proprioception' (1965).<sup>270</sup> Olson's poetic essay 'Proprioception' poetically presents the 'unconscious' as a fleshly intermediate space, represented in the form of literal space upon the page as well, but by 1962 Olson had already acknowledged such potentialities in Merleau-Ponty, where the unconscious was a corporeal entity within the spatial 'element' of the flesh. Olson's conceptualisation of proprioception and readings of Merleau-Ponty, however, were continually anticipated by his studies of Lawrence, which culminated in Olson's work with Robert Creeley, another Lawrentian at Black Mountain, from 1950 to 1952.

Olson's poetic developed on through 1950, and while his wider interests continued to appropriate a plethora of figures and philosophies, he continued to privilege Lawrence, particularly Lawrence's physical positioning between objects and histories, or between notions of internal and external. For example, Lawrence's conceptualisation of 'blood-consciousness,' as found in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, had grappled with a corporeal unconscious that is much akin to Olson's 'Proprioception,' where the unconscious surfaces as the body. As such, both Lawrence and Olson's formulations of an unconscious are comparable to that which Merleau-Ponty derived from his early

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<sup>269</sup> Helen Molesworth, *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College: 1933-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 71.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

(mis)readings of Lacan. In 1951 and '52, Lawrence's novella *The Escaped Cock* exemplifies for Olson how an unconscious but sensual 'space' was the primary subject, one existing between bodies, objects, and signs. Olson's 1952 essay, 'The Present Is Prologue,' would quote from *The Escaped Cock* when outlining a new somatic poetic, much like Lawrence's 'Poetry of the Present'. In Olson's 1951 essay, 'The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence and the Real,' Olson had agreed with Creeley, that *The Escaped Cock* was a new form of perception, one that could be applied to a poetic form. *The Escaped Cock* is a narrative formed by 'the man who died' (Christ) being perpetually reoriented by his 'wounds' and the healing 'touch' of 'space' and 'sunlight'. The protagonist, 'the man who died,' is incessantly (dis)oriented by the 'touch' of such 'light,' and he reflects upon space's grip as it continues to lead him. Though 'the man who died' feels his way through the invisible phenomena, it is the narrative's preoccupation with chiasmic space that allows Olson to develop a poetic which resists Williams's objectivism of 'things' and instead call attention to the space between places, histories or language. Such a poetic can be seen in Olson and Creeley's timely response to Rainer Maria Gerhardt in '51, which came in the form of Olson's poem, 'To Gerhardt, There, Among Europe's Things of Which He Has Written US in His "Brief an Creeley und Olson"'. As in previous sections, the poem not only works out a Lawrentian concept concurrently being written about in Olson, but the physical form of the poem acts out the bodily space which the poem attempts to historicise.

Olson's 1965 'Proprioception' has become emblematic for a bodily poetic,<sup>271</sup> and Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* is also iconic for Lawrence's blood-consciousness and plasmic poetic. 'Proprioception' and *Fantasia* each present the unconscious as a physical dynamic working upon and inside the body, and each captures the unconscious interstitial space as a mode of perception. Divya Saksena has shown that *Fantasia* relies upon an 'emotional logic' to resist the 'fallacy of understanding,'<sup>272</sup> but

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<sup>271</sup> Jonathan Skinner, 'Somatics: Finding ecopoetics on the disability trail'. *Jacket2*. <http://jacket2.org/commentary/jonathan-skinner>. Skinner invokes 'Proprioception' when introducing a somatic poetic for walking 'the disability trail'

Charles Bernstein, 'Undone Business,' p. 322. Bernstein, among others, finds Olson's 'body' of 'proprioception' exemplified in *The Maximus Poems*.

<sup>272</sup> Divya Saksena, 'The Fallacy of Understanding': D.H. Lawrence's Emotional Logic in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Apocalypse*. *Études Lawrenciennes*, 42 (2011), pp. 123-152.

*Fantasia's* primary force lies in its attention to the conflicted dynamics working within and upon the flesh. In Lawrence's common pre-Socratic gesture, *Fantasia* claims that there is no greater disservice to oneself than 'To know thyself,' and such self-knowledge becomes targeted through the body. An example is Lawrence's concept of 'polarisation' in *Fantasia*, which repeatedly opens up a fleshly space between forces in which to think. The 'solar plexus,' for Lawrence, is organically connected between the 'sun' and the 'nerves,' nerves which have 'tissues' which in turn respond to the 'moon'. This ostensibly invisible but carnal webbing, wherein outer-space works upon the surface of the skin as it does under the skin, also moves through the body's 'plasm,' as it had in 'Poetry of the Present,' but in *Fantasia* such 'plasm' interacts among various planes of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary dynamics,' comprising a 'blood-consciousness'. It is this internalisation of cosmic polarity which defines the body as the mediating site between senses of self and otherness as well. Within the chapter 'Plexuses, Planes and So On,' Lawrence describes the outer-space as an interior space, both of which are the *not-I*: 'A change has come. Here I know no more of myself. Here I am not'.<sup>273</sup> Lawrence's 'Here' exists not as the 'I' but as the changing vessel which precedes and exceeds the 'I'. As such, the space around the 'I am' is not a negative space or void, but a material space, one 'yearning towards that which is outside of me, beyond me, not me': 'Behold, that which was once negative has now become the only positive. The other being is now the great positive reality, I myself am as nothing. Positivity has changed places'.<sup>274</sup> Here Lawrence recognises that the body which was once thought to be an 'other being' of 'nothingness' by one's self-identity is now the 'other being' which is given positivity, while the transcendental notion of 'I myself' is now 'nothing'. What appears most vital to *Fantasia* is that these poles of negativity and positivity require an underlining reversibility of being from one side of a physical place to another. This physical being is what Lawrence postulates as the interstitial (unconscious) space of plasm, which thinks *between* an external flesh and a reflective interiority.

*Fantasia* prided itself on its antagonistic content, which further provoked the reader through its deceptively argumentative prose style, masking a piece of creativity as

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<sup>273</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 82.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

non-fictional and ostensibly philosophical.<sup>275</sup> Olson's 'Proprioceptive,' on the other hand, adopts a similar reversibility of occupied space but radicalises the content of the essay by giving it a more poetic form. The subject of 'Proprioception' exists within 'the cavity of the body' but also upon 'the surface (senses—the "skin"'. In illustrating such, the form of the writing drifts forward through space while rocking backwards, mimicking the description of one's vision moving towards the skin yet back inside the body, an enfolding perception 'in which the organs are slung. . .':

Physiology:           the surface (senses—the 'skin': of Human  
                                   Universe') the body itself—proper—one's own  
                                   'corpus': PROPRIOCEPTION the cavity of the body,  
                                   in which the organs are slung... <sup>276</sup>

In Olson's proprioception, these slinging 'organs' include one's 'soul' and 'unconscious,' which are also physical elements, as they were in Lawrence's *Fantasia*. And we can take Olson quite literally in 'Proprioception' when he weaves the soul into the body: 'The "soul" then is equally "physical." Is the self. | Is such, "corpus"'.<sup>277</sup> The soul is a physical corpus, and therefore to perceive 'the soul is | proprioceptive,' continues Olson.<sup>278</sup> Such physicality allows Olson, like Lawrence, to draw up a topography of the mind-body, since psychical depth is but another material space. 'Proprioception' locates the body as a space intertwining the universe and the 'place' of the 'unconscious':

The advantage is to 'place' the thing, instead of  
                                   It wallowing around sort of outside, in the  
       THE 'PLACE'       Universe, like, when the experience of it is intero-  
       OF THE           ceptive: it is inside us/& at the same time does

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<sup>275</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, p. 51-65. In the 'Foreword: An Answer to Some Critics,' Lawrence argues that the purpose of the book is to provoke and generate disagreement or affect in the reader, which was precisely the achieved result, as Lawrence lists several examples of those who took the book's philosophy at face value and thought it preposterous.

<sup>276</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 181.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*.

‘UNCONSCIOUS’ not feel literally identical with our own physical or mortal self... <sup>279</sup>

By putting 'place' and 'unconscious' within inverted commas, Olson expresses his struggle to redefine and relocate such terms, but his proposition is further clarified by the form of the entry, rather than by its diction. The smaller objects of the world, seen here in lower-case and stretching outward, are indeed 'wallowing around sort of outside,' within an outer space objectified by 'intro-ceptive,' or introspection, but 'THE "PLACE" OF THE "UNCONSCIOUS"' is wrapped by the 'Universe' and insulated by a concrete barrier of space. Therefore, this physical site of the unconscious is situated within a bodily space which may not 'feel literally identical' with the 'PLACE' of the "UNCONSCIOUS" but the unconscious is indeed sharing the body's 'physical' space.

Lawrence and Olson's reversal of space, where they find a seemingly negative outer-space to be a perception of the body-unconscious, is an embodiment of space comparable to Merleau-Ponty's bodily perception of the unconscious. Merleau-Ponty would eventually blend a 'crude Freudian biologism,' as found in his *L'Oeuvre de Freud*,<sup>280</sup> with a Lacanian unconscious, that is, before Merleau-Ponty developed an 'ambivalent consciousness' in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. In his 1951 lecture, 'Man and Adversity,' Merleau-Ponty renders the unconscious as a bodily experience in space that remains ambivalent in its knowledge production or conscious objectivity. For Merleau-Ponty, unlike in either Freud or Lacan, the unconscious is not a foreclosure or third figure, but an affected and tangible space within an '*ambiguous perception*'. Merleau-Ponty states:

[The unconscious] cannot be a process 'in the third person'; since it is the unconscious which chooses what aspect of us will be admitted to official existence, which avoids the thoughts or situation we are resisting, and which is therefore not *unknowing* but rather an unrecognized and

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>280</sup> James Phillips, 'Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology,' in *Disseminating Lacan*, ed. David Pettigrew and Francois Raffoul (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 78.

unformulated knowing that we do not want to assume. In an approximate language, Freud is on the point of discovering what other thinkers have more appropriately named *ambiguous perception*. It is by working in this direction that we shall find a civil status for this consciousness which brushes its objects (eluding them at the moment it is going to designate them, and taking account of them as the blind man takes account of obstacles rather than recognizing them), which does not want to know about them, and knows about them to the extent that it does not know about them, and which subtends our express acts and understandings.<sup>281</sup>

The unconscious of Merleau-Ponty's early formation here does not understand external objects when perceiving them, but, like the blind man, 'brushes objects' and orients his attention by 'taking account of them' through a bodily experience of an otherwise unknown. Judith Butler, in 'Merleau-Ponty and the Touch of Malebranch,' states that the early Merleau-Ponty 'makes clear the sense of the "unconscious" that he accepts, and it has to do with the way in which the unknown, and the unknowable, pervades the horizon of consciousness'. His concern, Butler continues, was 'how an order of unintelligibility that is not fully recoverable by consciousness makes itself known, partially and enigmatically, at the level of corporeity and affect'.<sup>282</sup> It is the body's affected perception that would become grounded in an ambiguous space which fills the gap between external objects, the unconscious, and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty's unconscious is comparable to Olson's ability to make the space of the body the very site to resist philosophical and scientific objectification, and therefore duality.

As seen in Olson's 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind' (1950), Lawrence's strong grip on the body is considered a subversion of metaphysics, and, in 1951 and '52, Olson will also place Lawrence's bodily prospection as the end of the Hegelian tradition, including Marx. Olson told Creeley in 1952, that modern history is conceptualised from 'Hegel to Lawrence'. In that '52 letter, Olson initially targets the 'two LIES' of modern history, each born between 1830 and 1850. The first is 'Evolution,' 'that

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, p. 60.

nature is a fate,' while the second is 'that the State is a fate equal to nature,' as 'MARX is only the image of all that has come since, capitalism, communism, fascism and all the naive and saintly oppositions to all three—the thin boys, the palefaces, the untragic ones'.<sup>283</sup> The objective or optimistic trajectory of scientific evolution and of historical materialism reinforce the tragic state of Man, says Olson, and though Merleau-Ponty respected the potential need for Marx's science, he, along with Olson and Lawrence, favored the sensual in Marx's wake. Olson's distemper in this particular letter is partly due to the FBI visiting his house,<sup>284</sup> presumably investigating any communist ties (as they did with Dorothy Parker in 1951), but Olson reiterates his distaste for all 'the palefaces,' and instead maps a way out of modern consciousness and its History, noting the early signs of Melville and Rimbaud, symptoms ultimately embodied by Lawrence:

Still it goes: MELVILLE (shaped in those same years DIFFERENTLY) |  
 RIMBAUD (the first man confronted with the RESULTS)... |  
 LAWRENCE, THE MAN WHO SAW: what he saw (and he's the only  
 one who saw, up to the men who were born after 1910) was, that the  
 MIND is a TEMPTATION which has to be defeated | and my own sense  
 is that CONJECTURE is the defeat of DIALECTIC, is the ploughing back  
 of that thing, the male mind, [into *deleted*] to the INSTANT...(((by god,  
 just checked Hegel's dates, and find he dies just where I date the birth of  
 the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 1831 (from 1770. For it was he who put the name on the  
 mal-usage which made the modern world, that thing raised on those TWO  
 LIES he gave these DIALECTICAL triumphs their language | (I have this  
 horror, —oh to hell with it, only, | THIS: | HEGEL to LAWRENCE | and  
 CONJECTURE takes all that energy...takes all that energy and redispenses  
 it ANTI-HISTORY, says, the INSTANT...what troubles me, is, that I find  
 it necessary to be myself dialectical in order to expose the condition of  
*same!*<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, vol 8, p. 73.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, vol 8, p. 72.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, vol 9, pp. 74-75.

This loaded passage is a sigil of Olson's poetic at the time, as he refers to both Melville and Rimbaud within the framework of Creeley's 'CONJECTURE,' taken from Creeley's 1951 'Notes For a New Prose,' and Dahlberg's 'INSTANT,' as seen earlier in a Lawrentian context in 'Projective Verse'.<sup>286</sup> But while Melville and Rimbaud introduce the ennui and despair of two cursed poets caught in modernity's drive, it is Lawrence's particular vision that is the anti-dialectical or hyperdialectical 'INSTANT' which disrupts the alienating movement of modern history.

The specific context and handling of Lawrence in this passage, 'Hegel to Lawrence,' is elusive in its motley of allusions, as the passage is mostly comprised of signposts and derivations from Olson's other writings at that time. Olson's moniker for Lawrence as 'THE MAN WHO SAW' is a reference to Lawrence's novella *The Man Who Died* (also entitled *The Escaped Cock*). For Olson, Lawrence's perception in *The Man Who Died* had shown Lawrence to be the 'only one who saw, up to the men who were born after 1910,' that 'the MIND is a TEMPTATION which has to be defeated'. Olson is thereby referring to *The Man Who Died* within the context of his 1950 essay, 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind,' and to Olson's 1949 post-modern poem 'La Préface,' where 1910 embodies the historical subject between the dead corpse and a new body of space, discussed earlier. But now the figure of Lawrence rests among 'the men who were "born" after 1910,' despite Lawrence being born in 1885. Lawrence, in other words, as represented by his sensible treatment of both the intellectual hare and the bodily tortoise in 'High Temptation', represents a projective, post-modern 'INSTANT'.

Olson deploys 'The Laurentian act,' which 'is the answer to metaphysics' in 'High Temptation,' against Hegel's dialectical idealism in this letter, and though Olson's philosophical conjecturing here is itself quite speculative, especially since Olson's readings of Hegel are evidently weak, Olson's grand gesture is nevertheless quite definitive of his poetic (and its relation to Lawrence). Olson's notorious habit of pontificating from texts which he had only skimmed (also observed in Olson's invocations of *The Phenomenology of Perception*) nevertheless over-emphasises his personal positioning, albeit at the cost of clarity. Thus it is perhaps worth noting Olson's reading of Hegel, in order to further define Olson's Lawrentian position. Olson had only

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<sup>286</sup> see previous section on Dahlberg, Creeley and Lawrence in 'Projective Verse.'



read one of Hegel's texts, which he did not own.<sup>287</sup> William Wallace's *The Logic of Hegel* (1873), which is a translation of the first section of Hegel's *Encyclopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1817),<sup>288</sup> known as 'The Logic' (aka, the *Lesser Logic*). Olson's impatient readings are truncated even more by Wallace's abridged edition, which was issued for teaching purposes. Yet a reading of the Lesser Logic seems opportune for Olson's prerogative, since the text focuses on a logic that privileges emotional feelings [*Gefühl*], rather than the sensual feelings [*Empfindung*]. In the text which Olson surveyed, 'there is no great distinction to be made between sentience [*Empfindung*] and feeling [*Gefühl*],' writes Robert R. Williams,<sup>289</sup> and Hegel's distinct preference for *Gefühl* would not be made until his 1830 edition of *Encyclopedia*, not included in Wallace's version, where 'feeling (*Gefühl*) is [the] higher-order term than sensation (*Empfindung*); feeling [*Gefühl*] represents a deeper, fuller sense of the self as a totality,' states Williams.<sup>290</sup> Whether Olson reflected upon such a discrepancy is unknown, but Olson's instrumentalisation of Lawrence's sensible body against Hegel, in the form of *The Man Who Died*, is a position well versed in Lawrence.

Olson's exceptional valuation of Lawrence's *The Escaped Cock* (*The Man Who Died*) is a testament to their shared attendance to bodily perception and a clue to the embedded role of sexuality therein. In Merleau-Ponty's chapter, 'The Body In Its Sexual Being,' Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of psychoanalysis appears relatable to Olson and Lawrence, wherein sexuality is an ambiguously present form of knowledge within the (un)conscious body, and thus sexuality is ill-fashioned when either objectified or ignored. Merleau-Ponty writes, 'Our constant aim is to elucidate the primary function whereby we bring into existence, for ourselves, or take a hold upon, space, the object or the

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<sup>287</sup> Charles Olson's Reading: A Biography, p. 105

<sup>288</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. *Encyclopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (Berlin: Berlag von Dunder und Sumblot, 1840).

<sup>289</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. by Robert R. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 111. '*Empfindung* is the transient impression or effect an object produces in us. For this reason it is essentially linked with passivity of the subject and connected to an external given [...] *Gefühl*, on the other hand, is not dependent upon any identifiable object or] stimulus ready at hand, and is this more related to the subject's unity and activity, including mood, emotion, etc., in contrast to sensations (*Empfindungen*) and impressions (*Eindrucken*).'

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

instrument, and to describe the body as the place where this appropriation occurs'.<sup>291</sup> Contrary to Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalysis, reality is saturated in a sexuality that is implicit and ambivalent in its cognitive or linguistic structuration and its fixed orientation towards defined objects of desire. Merleau-Ponty continues: 'Erotic perception is not a *cogitatio* which aims at a *cogitatum*; through one body it aims at another body, and takes place in the world, not in a consciousness. A sight has a sexual significance for me, not when I consider, even confusedly, its possible relationship to the sexual organs or to pleasurable states, but when it exists for my body'.<sup>292</sup> Sexuality exists as a body, neither conscious nor unconscious, for 'sexual life is one more form of original intentionality,' bringing into 'view the vital origins of perception,' where an 'intentional arc' may endow 'experience with its degree of vitality and fruitfulness'.<sup>293</sup> In seeing the potential in reinterpreting Freud's sexuality, as he did Freud's unconscious, Merleau-Ponty may 'concur with the most lasting discoveries of psychoanalysis':

Whatever the theoretical declarations of Freud may have been, psychoanalytical research is in fact led to an explanation of man, not in terms of his sexual substructure, but to a discovery in sexuality of relations and attitudes which had previously been held to reside in consciousness. Thus the significance of psychoanalysis is less to make psychology biological than to discover a dialectical process in functions thought of as 'purely bodily', and to reintegrate sexuality into the human being.<sup>294</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's body of space is not directed towards a designated teleology, object or structure, but instead remains saturated in the sexual atmosphere. It is the 'invisible' affects of sexuality that inform the visible world for Merleau-Ponty, and therefore the sexualised body of 'space' cannot be objectified even as a real body, distinct from the body of language or phenomenal space. Such a focus upon a sexual and ambiguous

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<sup>291</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 178.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

atmosphere between bodies, which envelops bodies, is also seen in Merleau-Ponty's evaluation of the psychoanalytic scene and the role of transference between patient and analyst, since it is not so much the psychical or social space between self and other that Merleau-Ponty primarily locates, but how the patient is continually reliving his sexual past 'only by seeing his past in the perspective of his co-existence with the doctor,' within 'the rapport [which the truth about a life] establishes between two lives in the solemn atmosphere of transference'.<sup>295</sup> The sexuality so often defining Lawrence, and especially the consummation of Christ and Isis in *The Escaped Cock*, similarly becomes a case where Olson will primarily perceive a sensual atmosphere of 'space' that exists between things, rather than distinct objects, sexes, or bodies.

*The Escaped Cock* was written in two parts, from 1927 to 1929, at the end of Lawrence's life. 'Part One' introduces an anonymous Christ-figure in a tomb, 'the man who died,' who awakens with wounds and an inner nausea that draw his body towards a sense of light and space, a movement driving most of the text. As 'the man who died' escapes his former ideals (none of which are explicated), he follows only invisible but tangible things, like the touch of the sun and the sound of a crow (the cock): bodily senses of 'the phenomenal world' which were not previously felt. In 'Part Two,' the man finds himself at the temple of 'Isis-in search,' who becomes Christ's teacher and consummates his living flesh, as if Christ were the lost Osiris. Yet Isis and the unnamed man eventually part ways, each continuing their search for a body to re-form. 'Part Two' will end as each becomes ingrained within a larger presence of physical 'Space,' the 'great rose of Space'. As T.R. Wright notes, Lawrence's long appropriation of the resurrection narrative, from 1914 until his death in 1930, attempted 'to reverse conventional Christian fear of the body,'<sup>296</sup> and, after Lawrence's surprising recovery from illness in Mexico in 1925, his poetics of resurrection would ultimately rise up as *The Escaped Cock*. The title implies that the penis is Lawrence's instrument for navigating a new mode of life, but the title originated from a children's toy-model of a white rooster hatching from its shell, a

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<sup>295</sup> David E. Pettigrew, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Unconscious,' in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World*, ed. by Dorothea Olkowski, James Morley (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 63.

<sup>296</sup> T.R. Wright, *D.H. Lawrence and the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 215.

form of resurrection, which Lawrence and Earl Brewster saw in a shop window during their Etruscan travels.<sup>297</sup> The title, *The Escaped Cock*, was changed to 'Resurrection' when originally published in *The Forum*, to avoid sexual innuendoes and to stress its corporeal re-birth. The novel's succeeding title, *The Man Who Died*, was posthumously published without Lawrence's consent, although the phrase does keep the anonymity of the protagonist throughout the text.

*The Escaped Cock's* intended subversion and transvaluation of modern idealism were also incubated in Nietzschean thought. The Sermon on the Mount in *Twilight of the Idols* depicts a 'war on passion,' a 'castration' of desire and a rancor for life.<sup>298</sup> Nietzsche's re-imagined Socrates, who is exhausted from life and the flesh, must offer a rooster to the god Asclepius in order to be healed. From such malady, Nietzsche's *Antichrist* accuses Jesus's followers of their 'anti-natural castration of a God into a God of the merely good,'<sup>299</sup> and *The Will to Power* blames Christianity for 'the loss of an organ' and proposes that 'only the castrated man is a good man'.<sup>300</sup> Even *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, like *The Escaped Cock*, suggests that had Jesus lived longer he 'would have learned to live and learned to love the earth—and laughter as well'.<sup>301</sup> In this context, the cock's crow recalls the change of a new dawn, a creatively resurrected form of life from patriarchal castration, amid its phallic undertones. John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz summarise 'the man who died' as a transformation into the god of healing, like Nietzsche's Asclepius: 'As the divine healer, [Asclepius] was the classical counterpart to the Christian Savior,' and the 'cure is symbolised in [the man's] assumption of the Asclepian role as the "healer" associated with the cock'.<sup>302</sup> Teunissen and Hinz conclude 'Savior and Cock' by recognising that the cock heals by acknowledging the presence of light: 'The cock was the common sacrifice made to Asclepius by those whom he had cured [and] the cock was viewed as an appropriate sacrifice because it was the herald of the dawn, and Asclepius

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>302</sup> John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz, "Savior and Cock': Allusion and Icon in Lawrence's 'The Man Who Died', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 5:2 (April, 1976), pp. 279-296 (283).

was the god who restored to the ill "the light of day".<sup>303</sup> Although Olson himself has little to say about Nietzsche, Lawrence's resistant transvaluation of the 'Sun' and the healing of 'light' call attention to the bodily perception of space itself, which resonates with Olson's particular lens.

The narrative of *The Escaped Cock* is preoccupied in reflecting upon the subject's sensation of space, rather than his personal history, his intentions, or the physical appearances of him or his world. Its opening pages find 'the man who died' arising with an inner motion, a 'movement' of 'nausea,' and his back story, albeit connoted, is never explained. He awakens underneath a shroud:

A deep, deep nausea stirred in him, at the premonition of movement. He resented already the fact of the strange, incalculable moving that had already taken place in him: the moving back into consciousness. He had not wished it.<sup>304</sup>

What was unconscious is moving into consciousness, as an inner motion is calling him outward. Feeling his aching body, cold hands and heavy eyelids, 'the man who died' peels off his bandages and 'leaned frail hands on the rock near the chinks of light'.<sup>305</sup> It is the touch of light which pulls him out of the tomb and into his undead body:

Strength came from somewhere, from revulsion; there was a crash and a wave of light, and the dead man was crouching in his lair, facing the animal onrush of light. Yet it was hardly dawn. And the strange, piercing keenness of daybreak's sharp breath was on him. It meant full awakening.<sup>306</sup>

'Having nowhere to go,' the direction of 'the man who died' is not oriented by any destination or object, but by the invisible phenomena: 'Advancing in a kind of half-

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 289.

<sup>304</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 165.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

consciousness under the dry stone wall of the olive orchard, he was roused by the shrill wild crowing of a cock just near him, a sound which made him shiver as if electricity had touched him'.<sup>307</sup>

Olson particularly adored these passages, where 'the man who died' feels the electric crow of the rooster. Olson had written to Boldereff, 'but is there anywhere the equal of the "he's" realization, now that he has been dead, that the dimension of life to hew to lies in life itself, and is that extra dimension which is separateness, the bronze separateness of the clanging COCK?'<sup>308</sup> Carrying the double-entendre over to Boldereff, Olson appeals to the 'clanging COCK' as an invisible but tangible space between them, that loud 'separateness'. Olson does touch on a Nietzschean element when admiring the space of the crow, as such a sensation is both adverse to the objectification of religious worship and to the alienating labour of modernity, which 'the man who died' escapes from. Olson continues:

For it is, that resistance in us to good when it is exposed before us without its proper cloak, the cloak which returns it to us as object, for use, not for aspiration— or worship. It is this damned religious overtone that I despise, the 'ideal', 'noble', 'Truth'. Shit. Why I cry, 'Lawrence,' is—o god he is beautiful—he knew. I have read 'The Man Who Died' or 'The Escaped Cock', and there is one perception in it which I do not think any other man before him had made.<sup>309</sup>

The 'perception' Lawrence captures, continues Olson, is that 'there is so much work to be done': 'It is the "he" the story's recognition, when he is confronted again by Madeleine, that the depth of his human disillusion lies in the double edged thing that humans do, they both give and they take too much'.<sup>310</sup> Olson refers to the scene where Madeleine confronts him, 'Master!... will you come back to us?', but Christ responds by refusing to

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>308</sup> *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 111.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

be enslaved by his Father's idealistic work, 'the day of my interference is done'. Instead, Lawrence's Christ limits his perception of reality to the flesh:

for me the end is past... For me, that life is over... I wanted to be greater than the limits of my hands and feet, so I brought betrayal on myself... For my reach ends in my fingertips, and my stride is no longer than my toes... and soon I can turn to my destiny like a bather in the sea at dawn, who has just come down to the shore alone.<sup>311</sup>

Olson's praise is directed at Lawrence's mode of 'perception,' which refuses to work for ideals or to view a past or future beyond bodily space, and where the other can be finally encountered, as Lawrence's Christ admits, 'I who never truly embraced even one'.<sup>312</sup> Olson continues, 'And how I know what Lawrence is talking about! And how it does, what he says, put a man off. God, god, what an incredible perceiver he was. It is beyond belief (except that he proves it) that a man should have gotten in there so far—by his own little means, bless him, and all separate humans like him'.<sup>313</sup> Olson's letter was written in 1950, alongside 'D.H. Lawrence and the High Temptation of the Mind' (1950), clarifying Olson's thesis of 'the Laurentian act' as 'the profoundest of all sensualities,' and here the perception of a bodily space in *The Escaped Cock* contextualises Olson's projection 'Hegel to Lawrence,' for Olson had concluded in 'High Temptation': 'It is time we tested the philosophers by the very test they are quick to disarm their critics of. Lawrence was not disarmed, he made bold, because he had earned the right, he had paid the price, to test them as he tested Christ. (In *The Man Who Died* he applied the test to Christ—and is, so far as I know, the only man who has.)'.<sup>314</sup> The passage which Olson keeps alluding to, that sounding of the cock, is perhaps most indicative of the narrative's mode of perception, which experiences the phenomenal world not as objects but as a space where the body's sensations and the phenomenal world are perceptually interwoven. The passage reads:

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<sup>311</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 168.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>313</sup> *A Modern Correspondence*, p. 110.

<sup>314</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 137.

The brave sounds rang out, and though they were diminished by the cord round the bird's leg, they were not cut off. The man who had died looked nakedly on life, and saw a vast resoluteness everywhere flinging itself up in stormy or subtle wavecrests, foam-tips emerging out of the blue invisible, a black and orange cock or green flame-tongues out of the extremes of the fig-tree. They came forth, these things and creatures of spring, glowing with desire and with assertion. They came like crests of foam, out of the blue flood of the invisible desire, out of the vast invisible sea of strength, and they came coloured and tangible, evanescent, yet deathless in their coming. The man who had died looked on the great swing into existence of things that had not died, but he saw no longer their tremulous desire to exist and to be. He heard instead their ringing, ringing, defiant challenge to all other things existing.<sup>315</sup>

The man and the cock have each been inflicted by their labour, in serving their masters, and what is introduced here, and what becomes 'tangible,' is not new *things* necessarily, but the abounding invisible phenomena which can be sensed physically, the 'ringing' 'sounds' and 'wavecrest, foam-tips' of a disclosed and present but not objectified desire, the 'defiant challenge to all other things existing'.

Although intermingling with a sensual space, 'the man who died' does not fixate upon the difference between his own body and a separate world, or between his identity and his sense of flesh. Rather, the narrative develops by interrogating the body as a being situated in a world of difference: intertwined but not yet synchronised. Lawrence continues, 'I will wander the earth, and say nothing. For nothing is so marvelous as to be alone in the phenomenal world, which is raging, and yet apart'.<sup>316</sup> Having been 'too much blinded' by self-consciousness previously, now 'I will wander among the stirring of the phenomenal world, for it is the stirring of all things among themselves which leaves me purely alone,' yet 'the man' will 'be fulfilled in his own loneliness in the midst of it,' for

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<sup>315</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 171.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*, p. 180.



'Strange is the phenomenal world, dirty and clean together! And I am the same. Yet I am apart! And life bubbles variously'.<sup>317</sup> Lawrence's reflective subject seems to undergo a change in perception similar to that introduced in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, which begins by resisting reflection's transcendental detachment from the world and affirming a recognition of immanency by attending to a sensory 'interrogation' of the invisible and visible affects of space. Resisting metaphysical conceptualisation, 'interrogation' does not posit the other as negation, but bestows upon the other a bodily presence of being that the subject reverses into itself, while differentiating its own body. In the chapters 'Interrogation and Intuition' and 'Interrogation and Dialectic,' Merleau-Ponty develops the notion of 'negintuition,' which will no longer experience the space of the other as negative space, nor as a Sartrean emptying of the subject-as-nothingness into the gaze of the other-as-being, who is the negation of nothingness. Rather, 'negintuition' senses the space of the other as the presence of being, and the subject is rather the 'reverse of being,'<sup>318</sup> rendering a 'hyperdialectical' space neither negative nor absolute plenitude. 'Negintuition, as experience,' writes Donald A Landes in *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression*, 'reveals "private worlds without shutting us up in them," and the philosophy of negation must offer an understanding of how there can be several points of entry to a world that no single perspective encompasses'.<sup>319</sup> The active and directive role that 'the phenomenal world' of space plays for 'the man who died' is one wherein the world is touching his body at the same time that he is touching the world, an ambiguous 'reversibility' that occurs within the chiasmic space between objects. The 'hyper-reflection' within Merleau-Ponty's chiasm resembles the language of 'the man who died,' where the flesh of the world and the flesh of the body become intertwined, the same and yet apart, as each is perceived as touching the other. The 'man who died' finds and defines itself only as among the 'bubbling' 'midst' of a 'phenomenal world' that is 'raging and yet apart,' and his flesh is perpetually healed and re-opened by touching and being touched by the 'sun' and 'space'.

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, p. 181.

<sup>318</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 59.

<sup>319</sup> Donald A Landes, *Merleau-Ponty and the Paradoxes of Expression* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 166.

Immediately upon exiting the tomb, the deep 'wounds' of the man's body are mended by the sun: 'the sun and subtle salve of spring healed his wounds, even the gaping world of disillusion'.<sup>320</sup> And yet the healing of his wounds is never fully achieved, as the man's wounds continually re-open and require further healing from the sun. Furthermore, the sun's healing potential is not stolen by Isis when she begins to heal Christ, for Isis's 'touch' becomes the 'touch' of the 'sun,' transforming into the 'new sun'.<sup>321</sup> Instead of the intermediary sunlight becoming Isis, a concrete object held at distance, Isis rather morphs into the sun, metaphorically and figuratively. In accordance, Christ's own wounds also become like the sun when touched: 'They are suns!' he responds after being touched, 'They shine from your touch'.<sup>322</sup> Like Merleau-Ponty's 'intertwining chiasm,' the ambivalent but bodily space here senses bodily differences and appears to embody space, as the touching of space becomes reversible—his skin, Isis's skin, and the space in between are each the touching 'sunlight'. The differences between the figures is neither objectified nor synthesised. For Merleau-Ponty, a hyper-reflectivity short-circuits objectivity by accounting for the '*écart*' and 'dehiscence' caused by the 'Flesh'. The chiasm, writes Véronique M. Fóti in 'Chiasm, Flesh, Figuration,' 'is really to hypostatize and singularize movement and an articulation that, being pervasive, take multiple forms,' and 'One can speak, for instance, of the chiasmatic interrelation of sentience and the sensible, of body and world, of the sensory modalities with each other and with motility, of visibility and the invisible, of self and other, idea and flesh, or of speech and meaning,' but each in a 'unity only insofar as they are themselves chiasmatically interlinked (which implies that they cannot be collapsed into any fundamental identity or "coincidence")'.<sup>323</sup> The disruptive re-opening of Christ's wounds and the healing of those wounds,<sup>324</sup> through the space of sunlight, provides the movement throughout the text, where material differences and multiplicities arise within a sensible unity that becomes nominally interlinked.

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<sup>320</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 179.

<sup>321</sup> John B. Humma, *Metaphor and Meaning in D.H. Lawrence's Later Novels* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), p. 107.

<sup>322</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 207.

<sup>323</sup> Véronique M. Fóti, 'Chiasm, Flesh, Figuration,' in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, Robert Vallier (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), p. 184.

<sup>324</sup> Described at length in the following section on Duncan.

The climaxing consummation of Isis and Christ, though but one section of the novella, nevertheless acknowledges the critical division of sexual difference in *The Escaped Cock*. However, the closing scene is also conclusive of the text at large, as Christ and Isis separate to continue their separate journeys of the flesh, and each is recognised as but a 'grain' within 'the great rose of Space'. Looking 'at the vivid stars before dawn,' Lawrence concludes:

How plastic it is, how full of curves and folds like an invisible rose of dark-petalled openness that shows where the dew touches its darkness! How full it is, and great beyond all gods. How it leans around me, and I am part of it, the great rose of Space. I am like a grain of its perfume, and the woman is a grain of its beauty. Now the world is one flower of many petalled darknesses, and I am in its perfume as in a touch.<sup>325</sup>

The passage provides an interesting case for Merleau-Ponty's chiasm. For Christ enters the 'dew' and 'touch' of the 'great rose of Space' as if it were a feminine, intrauterine space, which physically embodies the world which he is in; and yet Lawrence also places 'woman' as a like-speck of 'grain' within such 'Space,' except man is 'a grain' of Space's physical fragrance, while woman is 'a grain' of its physical 'beauty'. Each is but one distinguished difference within the embodiment of Space, where masculine and feminine power relations face a reversibility and yet a limit to sameness or equality. The 'flesh,' Merleau-Ponty claims, is the very 'visibility of the invisible,' but it is the invisibility (senses, affects, memory) which is what limits the 'corporeal reversibility' between the male subject and woman, as Gail Weiss stresses: the intermediary invisibility 'makes reversibility possible and, simultaneously, prevents it from being fully achieved'.<sup>326</sup> Yet it is this limit to complete sameness, which exists in the space in between, which touches on the very potential. In being within and embodied by such space, the body of space becomes the flesh of an anonymous and prepersonal realm, a 'flesh' defined by Sonia

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<sup>325</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 208.

<sup>326</sup> Gail Weiss, 'Écart: The Space of Corporeal Difference', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 207.

Kruks as that space which provides the 'general atmosphere of intersubjective communication prior to cognition and therefore prior to social or gender stratification'.<sup>327</sup> Lawrence's preoccupation with the 'touch' and the embodiment of 'Space' in *The Escaped Cock* introduces a vital space between sexual difference and objectification, a chiasmic 'space' which is also Olson's primary interest when reading the novella.

In Olson's 1951 essay, 'The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence and the Real,' Olson argues that the 'real' is not held by imaginary ideas or language, nor captured by William Carlos Williams's 'THINGS,' but the 'real' is the space held 'BETWEEN things'. For Olson, Lawrence was 'THE MAN WHO SAW,' and it was the perception in *The Man Who Died* which Olson situated in between the modern (before 1910), and the post-modern—the conjectural 'instant' of 'anti-history'. 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real' begins by stating that the novella's 'climax is not what happens to the characters or things [...] but is, instead, the issue of contest, the ISSUE of the man who writes—"broken stump" said my peer, "This is what a plot ought to be," for "The issue is what causes CHANGE, the struggle in- / side, the contest there, *exhibited*'.<sup>328</sup> The 'struggle' Olson sees is 'in / side,' and written in this way to signify the fleshly center between the 'in' and one's 'side'. By next stating that 'At root (or stump) what *is*, is no longer THINGS but what happens BETWEEN things,' Olson associates himself with Lawrence's chiasm by distancing himself from Williams's objectivism, which had proposed 'No ideas but in things'.<sup>329</sup> Lawrence's 'struggle' and 'contest' *between things* is the 'issue' of Olson's poetic form here as well. The essay next concludes by rephrasing Creeley's maxim in 'Projective Verse': 'If form is never more than an extension of content then the proposition reads thus: content (contest leading to issue arriving at change) equals form'.<sup>330</sup> As seen earlier, Olson had privileged Lawrence's sensual form of thinking in 1950, along with 'Projective Verse,' and here in '51 the physical space between things, objects, or written characters becomes a Lawrentian space where struggle, resistance and 'change' are the issue at hand.

Olson's 'The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence and the Real' also lists three phases which can define the poetic open-form of Olson's Lawrentian content. The initial

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<sup>327</sup> *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, p. 7.

<sup>328</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 138.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* For Williams's line, see his 'A Sort of Song,' and *Paterson*.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

step is to establish the site or ground where this 'ideal contest' (or contest with the ideal), can be carried out. Olson thus acknowledges that the concept of 'place' is required, as in Williams's Paterson or Olson's Gloucester, but in order to contest the 'thing' of place itself, in preference for space. Olson lists the first example: 'Lawrence vs place, ideal place,' as found in '(1) ETRUSCAN PLACES'.<sup>331</sup> *Etruscan Places*, as discussed in my 'Introduction,' is symbolic of Lawrence's tactile aesthetic, where feeling the walls of the dark tomb is an invisible experience of prospection, and here Olson uses *Etruscan Places* to introduce his second step, to locate the flesh: '(2) LADY CHATTERLY'S LOVER [where] the act of simplification to get objects in to exert other than psychological or introspective effects,' that is, to touch upon 'that simplest if sturdiest of all, sex, and itself, here, the physical or animal, straight'.<sup>332</sup> Olson's use of 'that simplest' and of 'simplification' most likely relates to Olson's usage of 'the single intelligence' from 1950 to 1952, an intelligence outlined in 'High Temptation'. Here the 'act of simplification' is also in step three, '(3) THE ESCAPED COCK, Part I'.<sup>333</sup> The 'real' which becomes simplified in *The Escaped Cock* is what Olson here calls 'the forever dark,' which is how Lawrence described 'the great rose of Space,' its 'dark-petalled openness that shows where the dew touches its darkness!'. In moving from the sexual connection in *Lady Chatterly* to the real 'forever dark' in *The Escaped Cock*, Olson is careful to avoid talking about the 'phallus' or 'penissmus,' but instead the 'well spring' of space, the 'conduit of darkness,' which exists equally between bodies: 'In other words the next step down from Lady Chatterly's L was to the dark or phallic god who is not phallic or penissimus alone but the dark as night the forever dark, the going-on of you-me-who-ever as conduit of that dark, the well-spring, whatever it is'.<sup>334</sup> Olson's preference for 'Part I' of the novella seems to read the highly sexualised 'Part II' back onto 'Part I'. Thus, Olson is undermining objective readings of phallocentricity by pointing to the more sexual area of the 'real' space and 'forever dark' which is the grounding for 'Part I' (before encountering Isis). The essay concludes that the act of vision within the phenomenological gap occurs 'between things,' as presented in *The Escaped Cock*. Olson quotes from the novella: 'Just open your

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, p. 139.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

eyes, as he did, the Man who died: | 1: the day of my interference is done | 2: compulsion, no good; the recoil kills the advance | 3: nothing is so marvelous as to be done alone in the phenomenal world which is raging and yet apart'.<sup>335</sup> Olson's bodily perception of the real space 'between things' seems to define Olson's current poetic in 1951, but most of this essay is taken from a letter to Creeley in 1950, intimately linking Olson's 'Projective Verse,' 'High Temptation,' and 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real'.<sup>336</sup>

Olson's poetics of *The Escaped Cock* arrive at a significant time in Olson's career, and from 1950 to 1952, Robert Creeley's shared enthusiasm for Lawrence seems to give Olson an extended platform to exercise, express and develop his Lawrentian poetics. In the 1951 letter to Creeley, wherein Olson outlined his ongoing study of 'the noun force, the magical of the noun as recurrence of the object' through space,<sup>337</sup> Olson also presents a graph of the authors he has studied to arrive at his poetic of the recurring object as a force upon the page. He lists Pound's *Cantos* as informing readings of Whitman, which Williams had likewise done for Poe, but Lawrence is shown contextualising Olson's current poetic:

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>336</sup> *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley*, vol 3, p. 63. Olson writes: 'that CONTEST is what puts drama (what they called story, plot) in to the thing, the writer's contesting with reality...but IF THE WRITER COMES TO ISSUE of same [added: (he well might not, & still have STORY) | which he does, or, he wldn't | be interested enuf to write | and that same ISSUE... 1) avoid any detail (fixedness) | 2) any manner assuming fact | 3) any item that is not completely & obviously open to CHANGE | the issue is what causes the CHANGE...therefore, the CONTENT (the contest leading issue arriving at CHANGE) | is | NO LONGER, THINGS, the TERMS, but | WHAT HAPPENS | BETWEEN THINGS...And thats issue of (1), (2), (3)–the job is, where we take off is (i speak not only narration but vision–& why, as you sd, '[DHL] worth 1000 Pounds') DHL | Now, all above is more pertinent to, say DHL as of KANGAROO, as last stop before R CR [*Robert Creeley*] (the most important novel, because, the writer in (I do not mean Somers only), going along, himself the contest, & him trying for issue) | Myself, I take it, DHL explored the other problem, was, at end, so attacking: L[ady] C[hatterley's L[over] (act of simplification to get the objects in to exert other than psychological or introspective effects...that is, the triumph or delight of *same* as Mellors is capable of teaching | the which (the act of simplification–the *same* to be carefully, o, so carefully, seen, as utterly different than, the elementary (even Stein) he also does in *ESCAPED COCK*...'.

<sup>337</sup> see first section on Olson here, for more context regarding this passage.

1850 Whitman Melville Poe

1915 Pound WCW Lawrence  
(CANTOS) (GRAIN) (STUDIES)

And then BANG, I read em, MR BLUE! 1950! <sup>338</sup>

Lawrence and his *Studies* introduce Olson's current phase, and suddenly Creeley arrives with a 'BANG'. I would argue that it is Creeley who could occupy the space above Lawrence. A few months later, in a July 23rd letter to Cid Corman, the editor of *Origin*, Olson commented on Corman's placement of 'The Escaped Cock: Notes on Lawrence & the Real' in an issue of *Origin*, which was to be published in an issue alongside Creeley's short-stories 'In the Summer,' '3 Fates' and 'Mr. Blue'. When seeing the issue's layout, Olson praised the symbolic placement of his essay 'The Escaped Cock' *between* Creeley's related illustrations:

...the fall of the COCK, just, where you have laid it in, between others, thus poised, rightly, off Creeley, and yet, between him more than between these others? (I cannot see how, that piece, of mine, could, placed as you have placed it, carry, any more power, going, as it goes straight from where our lad, in SUMMER, goes fr Lawrence - does not there yet know what Lawrence does, in what I have sd reads to me more true now than when I sd it—but is going, when, after his NOTES (which comes handily, fr SUMMER and my COCK, following after them) he will, he does, he can, he will and how we will move on even from Lawrence, in MR BLUE, the beginning of, his full seizure of, ACTION.<sup>339</sup>

This letter to Corman was composed alongside Olson's 'Introduction to Robert Creeley,' which held 'MR BLUE' as the paragon for a new poetic prose, and in a June 1951 letter,

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<sup>338</sup> Charles Olson & Robert Creeley, vol 7, p. 43.

<sup>339</sup> Charles Olson & Cid Corman, vol 1, p. 180.

just prior to both of these letters above, Olson wrote to Corman, 'For Creeley is the push beyond Lawrence. And Lawrence is the *only* predecessor who can carry narrative ahead'.<sup>340</sup> It is possible, in other words, to follow a narrative of Olson's developing poetic through his prototypical pairing of Lawrence's *The Escaped Cock* and Creeley's 'Mr. Blue.'

Creeley's 'Mr. Blue' became a centerpiece for Amiri Baraka's *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, as the short-story represents Creeley's mantra, 'Form is no more than an extension of content,' as Baraka confirms.<sup>341</sup> The single characteristic that binds the diverse anthology together, writes Baraka, is a vision of 'space': 'space as a fact of environment, either as it becomes overwhelming in its existence [or] as it disappeared and becomes taken up, used, by people and their biographies'.<sup>342</sup> Baraka introduces 'Mr. Blue' as 'aesthetically' painting the 'mainstream American life,' although the story is 'more intense' and 'certainly more tortured'.<sup>343</sup> The narrator of 'Mr. Blue' is a spectator at a tent-circus who remains distracted by the affected space of his wife sitting beside him. The other object in the story is a 'midget' performer standing opposite them, whom his wife had encountered earlier that day. Between the three, however, a sexually charged atmosphere disturbs and jostles the subject's conscious thought and prose alike. Neither object nor historical fact is concretised, but the overwhelming sensation of the room, from affect and memory, correlate the story's content with its form. The exact plot and awkward relationship between his wife and the midget is never clarified, but which the narrator hopes to communicate more clearly through the form of his writing: 'I don't want to give you only the grotesqueness, not only what it then seemed,' that is, of 'What had really happened like they say,' but the form of his writing 'might get me closer to an understanding of the thing I was'.<sup>344</sup> More than Lawrence's prose, Olson and Creeley adapt the content of a Lawrentian body of space in order to more accurately form the atmospheric dehiscence of perception and narrative,

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid, vol 1, p. 168.

<sup>341</sup> Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America* (New York: Corinth Book, Inc., 1963), p. xvi.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, p. xii.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. xiv.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, p. 181.



rendering a fragmentary and disoriented poetic prose. For example, in 'Mr. Blue,' Creeley writes:

The midget turned, then seemed to pull himself out of it, the distance, out of nothing, the eyes pulled in, to focus, to grow, somehow, smaller, larger. The eyes went over us, the voice, when it came, was breath, a breathing but way back in, wire, tight, taut, the scream and I couldn't hear it, saw only his finer move to point at her, beside me, and wanted to say, he's looking at you, but she was turned away from me, as though laughing, but struck, hit. I looked, a flash, side-ways, as it then happened. Looked, he looked at me, cut, the hate jagged, and I had gone, then, into it and that was almost that.<sup>345</sup>

The midget's distance is felt as deeply proximate, as his 'breath' and 'eyes went over us' but by retreating. The affected if not sexualised space in the narrative interrupts the narrator's reflection and its language. In his first reading of 'Mr. Blue' Olson was taken by its Lawrentian form, which at the time was defined in 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real' as a sexual connection that embodies the conflicted space between things. Upon its publication, Olson wrote to Creeley, on 23 July, 1951, overjoyed that his essay was placed between Creeley's stories, which ironically signified the essay's 'issue' of 'between things,' since Creeley and Olson had both composed their work in a Lawrentian form. Olson wrote: '(I can't get over it, this (my own, quadrangle, that, by god (by god, this Corman, how he *does* compose, a magazine! that, he should have placed, THE COCK, here, just where he does, off you, but, in between you too, and, that it should have been, does say, broken stump –and the way it says it, not at all with the melodrama Melville has it'.<sup>346</sup> When Creeley acknowledged their combined Lawrentian motif, Olson replied the next month, 'It was you [Creeley] who made it, "Lawrence, or Notes on the real,"' and

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<sup>345</sup> *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, p. 187.

<sup>346</sup> *Charles Olson & Robert Creeley*, vol 6, p. 187.

since Creeley found 'it possible to see anything I had to say had to do with the REAL!' wrote Olson, it 'was just abt the handsomest gift I ever got'.<sup>347</sup>

The Creeley-Olson correspondence is riddled with criticism on Lawrence, and their paired and paralleled works in the early '50s convey their Lawrentian vision. Just as poems such as 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing' may exhibit not only a Lawrentian content of space but its bodily form, so too does Olson's 1951 poem, 'To Gerhardt, There, Among Europe's Things of Which He Has Written US in His "Brief an Creeley und Olson,"' wrestle with narrativising and historicising the US and Europe, but the poem takes issue with place by focusing on the space in between the bodies of Gerhardt (Europe) and 'Creeley und Olson' (US or us). In doing so, the poem struggles not only to identify an object that is the space between such, but to identify the 'present' instant of such a space, opposed to the histories comprising that 'instant' of anti-history.

However, like most of Olson's poetry, the poem remains controversial, as readings have tended to find an American exceptionalism in Olson's American perspective of place and in his intellectual historicisation of such. Paul Christensen and Thomas Merrill have each pointed to the poem's 'authoritative' stance,<sup>348</sup> and Sarah Posman's recent essay on the poem concurs that the 'poet we encounter is convinced of his case,' that Gerhardt 'is stuck in a European mode of writing, which gets writers tangled up in discourse instead of setting them in contact with reality'.<sup>349</sup> Robert von Hallberg had read the poem as defending America, but Posman also stipulates that the poem represents the 'ways in which Olson's American poetic converges with, rather than opposes, European debates on the past and how to write it',<sup>350</sup> yet Posman attempts to do so only by showing that Olson 'is not alien to, but part of, the continental debate on history and history writing'.<sup>351</sup> Thus, while raising a keen point in Olson's defense, Posman appears to limit the poem as merely fighting 'logos' with further 'discourse'. I will argue that the poetic and form of the poem situates itself in the space between the history of American and European discourse, and does so quite literally.

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, vol 7, p. 120.

<sup>348</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 221.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid, p. 230.

Introducing the poem's context, Posman writes, 'In "To Gerhardt," then, Olson wants to persuade Gerhardt to move beyond what he refers to in "Human Universe" as logos or discourse, language by which one sets oneself apart from the world in order to discriminate, analyse and classify'.<sup>352</sup> Creeley and Olson had initially reacted against the Poundianism found in Gerhardt's letter,<sup>353</sup> and they turned their critique of Gerhardt's Poundianism into a critique of E.R. Curtius, who 'fails to coin a stance that could steer historical reflection in a new direction,' observes Posman, one away from modernists like Ernst Troeltsch, Arnold Toynbee and T.S. Eliot.<sup>354</sup> Posman spots Olson's criticism of Curtius's Bergsonianism from the poem's own cautious use of 'the Beauty,' and Olson criticises Bergsonian invocations of 'vitalism' while yielding to it at other times, argues Posman, since the concept of 'life,' Olson explains in the poem, 'means what nature offers, not what man DOES'.<sup>355</sup> By placing 'the Beauty' as his point of criticism against Gerhardt, I argue that Olson simultaneously finds himself critiquing Keats's 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever' and Williams's 'the Beautiful Thing' of *Paterson*; thus Olson critiques thingness itself, and substantiates the anti-historical moment of beauty that exists in the space between historicised things. Von Hallberg would write, 'To Olson contemporary western Europe was "the dead center of the top of time,"'<sup>356</sup> and Olson welcomes Gerhardt to his and Creeley's sense of 'space,' outside traditional language and history, but also outside the geocentric American space as well as its language. As he was in 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real,' at that time, Olson is concerned with the chiasmic 'in / side' regarding place as well as the symbolic.

Olson will therefore continually offer Gerhardt a 'space' that is a 'present' with a double-meaning, referring to a *gift* that is also given in the *present* instant. The poem is a reply to Gerhardt's own letter to Creeley in '51, and Olson's timely response is composed at the same time Olson was writing his essay 'The Present Is Prologue' (1952), which is an essay that continuously quotes from *The Escaped Cock*, something Robert von Hallberg misses when he uses 'The Present Is Prologue' to interpret the poem 'To

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 225.

<sup>353</sup> Rainer Maria Gerhardt was a German poet, editor of *fragmente*, and translator of Pound.

<sup>354</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 223.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, p. 224.

<sup>356</sup> Robert von Hallberg, *Charles Olson: A Scholar's Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 104.

Gerhardt'. Von Hallberg puts an incorrect date for the completion of 'The Present Is Prologue,' attributing it to 1950 (a year and a half earlier than the Gerhardt exchange), but in the *Collected Prose* (not the *Selected Prose* which von Hallberg read), the essay is dated 1952. A look at both the 'present' form or body of 'space' within both the poem and the essay can further tease out Olson's Lawrentian poetic.

Like 'The Story of an Olson,' where Olson escapes the 'teeth' of the 'enemy' ('time') by separating himself from a heritage of discourse through the body of space, in 'To Gerhardt,' Olson suggests he make contact with a past in which stories functioned as physical responses to worldly phenomena,' writes Posman.<sup>357</sup> Thus, in the poem, 'The first duty' 'is | to knock out' the 'teeth' of 'O Grandfather,' 'These are the teeth with which you devour all animals'.<sup>358</sup> By knocking out the 'teeth' from the mouth of history, Olson suddenly creates physical space from which to speak, which is not unable to 'lie' about the 'force' of 'place': 'I offer you no proper names | either from great cities | on the other side of civilization | which have only to be visited | to be got the hell out of [...] simply because place | as a force is a lie'.<sup>359</sup> With 'place' as a 'lie,' we can see Olson's concurrent Lawrentian conclusions in 'Notes on Lawrence and the Real,' where what is at issue is Lawrence's 'contest vs ideal place,' and the flesh in between. Olson will invoke this sense of space not with 'film, or of strange birds, | or of ordinary ones. Nor with the power of American vocables,' but through the 'present' form of sensible space:

the dead center of the top of time

I am giving you a present

I am giving you a present <sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> *Contemporary Olson*, p. 227.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, p. 213.

<sup>359</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 214.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid*, p. 216.

The sudden blocks of space are perhaps capable of communicating more concretely than the discourse included here. Along with the emphatic and boldly placed use of space, Olson's repeated 'present' shows the recurring noun of 'present' as being pushed by the real force of space, a repetition that is reminding Gerhardt of his 'forgetting,' which Gerhardt himself 'so beautifully reminds me | that the birds stand | in the middle of the air'.<sup>361</sup> Neither America nor Europe can be a place to settle one's language or form, but rather one should seek the dark fleshly hole of space, which Duncan reminded Olson of, a space noticed when receiving a 'present':

what Duncan pointed out America and Russia are very careless with)  
what blows about and blocks a hole where the wind was used to go

(While walking on the earth with stalks  
you received a present

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Olson's 'present' is not born from a historical lineage, ideal place or linguistic inheritance, but from dehiscence or a cut connection, for 'what you forget is, you | are their son!' but 'You are not | Telemachus,' but a bastard of a 'concubine'.<sup>363</sup> The poem's anchorage in place or discourse is being pulled back, yet criticism has found it difficult to let go; the poem's handling of space, on the other hand, is a form in which the 'present' is given. Moreover, 'space' presents a physical form, not simply as a gift but as a body, which birds stand on or fly in, a real where the poem situates itself and walks.

In the poem's closing sections, it is the body of space that beckons Gerhardt to relocate, and the form of the poem moves forward while doing so. The opening of the penultimate section, '4,' begins with a block of verse, which will then incrementally creep forward while addressing Gerhardt; but soon the section breaks up into space while 'time' and 'Language' are problematised and shed. The dialogic structure of the poem, which is a call and response between the Olson and Gerhardt, and between the poets and their grandfathers, is also a dialogical and (hyper)dialectical movement between a body in

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, p. 218.

language and in space, one concluding with 'the present' form of 'here'—'in a space' that is Gerhardt's gift:

Or come here  
where we will welcome you  
with nothing but what is, with  
no useful allusions, with no birds  
but those we stone, nothing to eat  
but ourselves, no end and no beginning, I assure you, yet  
not at all primitive, living as we do in a space we do not need to contrive

And with the predecessors who, though they are not our nouns, the verbs  
are like!

So we are possessed of what you cry over, time  
and magic numbers

Language,  
my enemy,  
is no such system:

"Hey, old man, the war arrived.

Be still, old man.

Your mouth is shut,

your door is shut."

As I said, I am giving you a present.

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid, pp. 219-220.

The large block of space upon the page being carved out or mapped by the poem's language is central. In this passage, 'Language' is no longer Olson's 'enemy' now that he the poet and poem are 'in a space'. In occupying such a space, the space on the page is given a form and a body which now reads like text, and, as in 'The Story of an Olson,' the language and space touch upon each other, with each being read and handled. Like the birds who travel over 'time,' or like quantifiable 'numbers' or rooted 'language,' the poem can only stand on a space now because space is wrapped as an anti-historical 'present'.

'To Gerhardt' attempts to fill the dualities of America/Europe, subject/object, content/form with an instant form of space that is also the topic of Olson's essay 'The Present Is Prologue,' where Olson again introduces his situation as a descendant of his parents's place in history. The essay then introduces Olson's 'bipolar approach to history,' writes von Hallberg, which relies on a 'history' of one's 'personal past,' like a 'place's history' and 'geography' (i.e. Gloucester), which includes a second approach of 'raging apart,' which, Hallberg defines, is but to 'batter landscapes until they yield a historical significance'.<sup>365</sup> However, unlike von Hallberg or Posman's position, Olson is not only combatting history and discourse with more history and discourse. In this context, Olson is offering a material 'present' of a different form—Lawrence's form of the 'instant' and 'between things'. 'The Present Is Prologue' opens, 'My shift is that I take it the present is prologue, not the past. The instant, therefore'.<sup>366</sup> And by declaring that a poem is the ongoing 'action' of 'its own interpretation, as a dream is [...] you, as the only reader and mover of the instant,' Olson continues to develop an aestheticising hermeneutic of such living space, which he outlines by drawing on Lawrence's 'instant' and the bodily 'instrument' Olson detected in 'High Temptation':

In the work and dogmas are: (1) How by form, to get the content instant;  
(2) what any of us are by the work on ourself, how make ourself fit  
instruments for use (how we augment the given—what we used to call the  
fate); (3) that there is no such thing as duality either of the body and the

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<sup>365</sup> *Charles Olson: A Scholar's Art*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>366</sup> *Collected Prose*, p. 205.

soul or of the world and I, that the fact in the human universe is the discharge of the many (the multiple) by the one (yrself done right, whatever you are, in whatever job, is the thing—all hierarchies, like dualities, are dead ducks).<sup>367</sup>

In also alluding to the poetics of 'Proprioception' and *Human Universe*, where the soul and skin are the space of thinking flesh, Olson finds his re-birth in between his parents's histories as between West and East, time and discourse: 'There are only two live pasts—your own (and that hugely included your parents), and one other which we don't yet have the vocabulary for, because the West has stayed so ignorant, and the East has lived off the old fat too long'.<sup>368</sup> Between the ideas of West and East, Olson is scratching at the physical and manual work of the poet in creating mythology, for 'Didn't Hesiod call his genealogy of the gods and men "the work of the days," yet nowadays the term 'mythological [is] too soft'.<sup>369</sup> In place of 'mythology,' Olson offers a more rigorous phrase which he pulls out of *The Escaped Cock*: 'What I mean is that foundling which lies as surely in the phenomenological "raging apart" as these queer parents rage in us'.<sup>370</sup> Instead of relying on history, place, or discourse to create a new Western narrative of the subject (mythology), 'The Present is Prologue' relies upon the bodily form of space and its presentation of the 'instant,' as dug up by *The Escaped Cock*.

In concluding the essay, Olson famously calls himself an 'archeologist of morning,' a moniker well-known in Olson criticism, but now it appears bound to the resurrecting call of dawn and the sensible digging of space within *The Escaped Cock*. The essay concludes by again placing Lawrence's prospection as the instrumental tip of the primal and anti-historical instant of Olson's (anti)Western poetic:

Therefore I find it awkward to call myself a poet or a writer. If there are no walls there are no names. This is the morning, after the dispersion, and the work of the morning is methodology: how to use oneself, and on what.

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, p. 206

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.



That is my profession. I am an archeologist of morning. And the writing and acts which I find bear on the present job are (I) from Homer back, not forward; and (II) from Melville on, particularly himself, Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence. These were the modern men who projected what we are and what we are in, who broke the spell. They put men forward into the post-modern, the post-humanist, the post-historic, the going live present, the 'Beautiful Thing'.<sup>371</sup>

In mapping 'Dostoevsky, Rimbaud, and Lawrence,' Olson paraphrases his 'Hegel to Lawrence' letter to Creeley, where Lawrence, 'THE MAN WHO SAW,' was 'anti-history' or the 'instant'. Quoting 'the "Beautiful Thing"' of Williams's *Paterson*, for example, Olson also touches on his sense of a 'Nameless' yearning, like 'the flame's lover,'<sup>372</sup> which Williams returns to in *Paterson* but which Olson critiques with Lawrence's 'between things'. The vast derivations of 'The Present Is Prologue' and its corresponding work, from 1950 to 1952, repeatedly situate Lawrence in the vital space of Olson's poetic.

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

<sup>372</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1992), p. 123.

## Chapter II

### To Touch Robert Duncan's Queer Undying

'At last after many years, they found out a thing they had been specifically trying for. They discovered that if you took a tiny little vein out of a man's body, and put it in a glass jar with certain leaves and plants, it became a man. When it had grown as big as a boy, you could take it out of the jar, and then it would live and keep on growing till it became a man, a fine man who would never die. He would be undying.'

~Lawrence, *The Undying Man*

*She.*            I have heard said  
                  There is danger in the body.  
*He.* Did God in portioning wine and bread  
         Give man His thought or His mere body?

~Yeats, 'Michael Robartes and the Dancer'

'The Master of Rime, time after time, came down the arranged ladders of vision or ascended the smoke and flame towers of the opposite of vision, into or out of the language of daily life, husband to one word, wife to the other, breath that leaps forward upon the edge of dying.'

~ Duncan, 'Structure of Rime I'

## The Resurrecting Fairy tale and Wounds of 'the man who died' in 'Towards the Shaman'

1935-1941

Robert Duncan's poetry is known for both unmasking the homosexual poet and avoiding the label of a 'homosexual'. A controversial voice for the gay-community, Duncan's semi-occasional refusals to be a 'leader' are self-fulfilling, antagonising his readers since high school while building a humanistic poetic out of fostering conflict.<sup>373</sup> His groundbreaking essay, 'The Homosexual in Society' (1944), scorned homophobia yet found the gay-community's reactionary exclusivity no less disturbing than heteronormative prejudice, and his 1970 lecture, 'Changing Perspectives Reading Whitman,' challenged empathetic readings of Whitman (a leading figure of the gay community) by pointing to Whitman's American exceptionalism.<sup>374</sup> Perhaps more provocative is Duncan's long dependence upon gender and sexual difference in his poetry. The gendering in Duncan's poetry is often implemented into fantasy narratives, in many ways representative of Duncan's particular Freudianism, but such gendering is also rooted in Duncan's readings of D.H. Lawrence, who remains a remote figure in Duncan criticism. To explore Duncan's provocative poetics of bi-sexuality, gender performance and sexual difference, his reliance upon Lawrence seems critical. Duncan had acknowledged criticism's general disregard for Lawrence in 1985 when addressing the veiled influences within Allen's *The New American Poetry*: 'I think Lawrence is a hidden integer in there, the estimate of Lawrence'.<sup>375</sup> Such critical blind-spots widen despite Duncan's occasional listings of Lawrence as one of his three forefathers: 'I had three: Pound, Williams, and D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>376</sup> This chapter therefore attempts to introduce a

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<sup>373</sup> Robert Duncan, 'Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife,' *Collected Essays and Other Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), p. 202.

<sup>374</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, *Paracritical Hinge* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2005), p. 126.

<sup>375</sup> Michael Andre Bernstein and Burton Hatlen, 'Interview with Robert Duncan,' *Sagetrieb*, 4:2-3 (Fall/Winter 1985), p. 109.

<sup>376</sup> Robert Duncan, 'Early Poetic Community (with Robert Duncan)'. *The American Poetry Review*, 3:3 (May/June 1974), pp. 54-58 (54). In a 1971 interview with Kent State, Duncan stated

history of Duncan's use of Lawrence. By retracing Duncan's poetics on gender and sexual difference, through queer readings of Lawrence, Lawrence emerges as an integral component for Duncan's queer poetics.

Though Duncan's earliest work from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s is often overlooked, his reliance upon a poetics of gender and resurrection, as found in Lawrence, appears to be foundational during these years. With the onset of WWII, Duncan's earliest poetry began to correlate sexual and social violence, which in turn enabled his literary guides to adopt a vital role. In 1976 Duncan looked back at his early WWII poems and elaborated upon the emergence of a bi-sexual 'fairy tale' utilised to control and resignify the sexual psychodramas estranging society, which he witnessed after the break up with Ned Fabs, Duncan's first boyfriend.<sup>377</sup> A 'wound' of loss returns throughout many of the poems in Duncan's first collection, *The Years As Catches*, particularly around its signature poem, 'Toward the Shaman,' which is part of series that relies upon male and female guides for the poet's resurrection. It is in this formidible phase that Duncan also expresses a dependence upon Lawrence's own resurrecting narrative, *The Man Who Died*, a novella which follows the mythological consummation between Christ and Isis. In this fantasy, 'the man who died' must also perpetually re-heal his 'wounds'. Duncan's and Lawrence's resurrection narratives each hinge upon gender and sexual difference, in order to create a new identity. However, such narratives of resurrection often invoke a teleology, not unlike the workings of fantasy, which can be problematic for the non-linear and dis-orienting trajectories of queer theory. Therefore, by first contextualising the crises of Duncan's bi-sexual fairy tale and its vital relation to Lawrence, a subsequent analysis finds that the recurring 'wounds' within *The Man Who Died* and Duncan's early poetry continually disrupt the progression of the text's resurrection.

In a 1976 interview Duncan recalls the 'bisexual' 'psychodramas' which were not only structuring his early poems but were plaguing 'the whole society, including

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that Kabalism had four fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Adam), 'And I had three: Pound, Williams, and D.H. Lawrence,' but then adds 'Olson'.

<sup>377</sup> The concept of the 'fairy tale' is defined throughout the following pages, but Duncan uses it to refer to a fantasy narrative of gender norms which one is inscribed into, with what he soon calls 'Prince Charming', for example. These unconsciously narratives or fantasies, structured by gender roles, is what Duncan describes as a 'psychodrama' driving and alienating him and society, causing harm to psychical and social communities, because such structures are divisive, restricting, and unreal.

heterosexuals,' wherein individuals either need to 'have a fuck' or feel 'lonely,' incapable of fostering real 'conviviality' among gendered communities.<sup>378</sup> For Duncan, a sexuality reduced to impulsive fucking was an apocalyptic symptom, as society's 'urges or pleasures have been channeled so exclusively in the sexual direction that our sexuality becomes very extraordinary' and cannot 'permit conviviality,' which has 'proved very hard for me, for one thing, to learn'.<sup>379</sup> Duncan witnessed the alienating structuration of heteronormative narratives, which he relates to the archetypal gendering of a 'fairy tale': 'We have come back to the fairy tale'.<sup>380</sup> Duncan speaks personally of his own bisexual escapades after Ned Fabs broke up with him in 1938: Duncan briefly became a gigolo, carried on sexual exploits with Anaïs Nin's wealthy cousin, Paul, in New York City, and constructed a relationship with Marjorie McKee in '41, whom he married in '43. Ekbert Faas's biography entitles this life phase, 'The Husband and Gigolo'. But soon Duncan began to create a poetic that could pilot such a fractious fairy tale:

I'd inherited the conventional fairy tale idea of a household, consisting of wife and husband. So I actually married [McKee], and always felt guilty in the marriage, although I married because I was in love. I felt guilt because in dreams and in poems it was the male I craved for marriage. In fact, my first poems where a woman really appears came some years after my marriage, and had to do with fairy tale experience.<sup>381</sup>

Duncan introduces a 'fairy tale experience' being integrated into his poetry around 1943. Since poems composed between '40 and '44 were worked into Duncan's '47 collection, *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, the early poems can be read as Duncan's fatal

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<sup>378</sup> Robert Duncan, Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan'. *Chicago Review*, 43:4 (Fall 1997), pp. 83-105 (96). Duncan uses the term 'conviviality' to express his aim at achieving a psychical and social community that is not driven apart by the 'fairy tale psychodrama—of gender roles and the drive of fucking it causes due to a lacking identity or real community. Conviviality is the achievement of a psychical and social community where each person can be both genders to another person, or their lover, as Duncan describes.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, p. 97

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

psychodramatic transition into the fairy tale movement through poems such as 'Toward the Shaman,' wherein the poet returns to the loss of 'N' (Ned) in order to 'pass thru'.

The naming of such a 'fairy tale experience' is a resignification itself, referring to fantasies of particular gender roles while reinscribing them into a queer pun. In playing out the structured bisexual psychodramas more creatively in his poetry, Duncan's psychical and social conviviality becomes less burdened, without the splitting (gendered) demands of either heteronormative or homonormative 'boundaries'. Duncan continues the interview by advocating his own fairy tale as a *mise en scène* with ranging roles, which the poet or its beloved can interchangeably perform: 'Bisexuality must mean the fairy tale stance where your Prince Charming knows his role and seeks for others who also require a mix of male / female. So we no longer have a psychodrama based on bartering,' since the 'true bisexual tries to arrive at a secret inner appointment he has with life and with a substantive partner who will manifest both genders'.<sup>382</sup> Duncan allows freeplay within fairy tale roles but also recognises such performances as mere creation, albeit restorative. Therefore Duncan is also conveniently obliged to cast off such symbolic and imaginary roles as unreal: 'since one's actual love for a living person is always stronger than any in a fairy tale, I could tell the fairy tale to go and fuck itself'.<sup>383</sup> By attending to the psychical structures and narratives of a bi-sexual fantasy, Duncan can then manipulate such structures and their relations.

Duncan's fairy tale performance resonates less with the homosexual tradition in American poetry that had disguised itself with heteronormative masks<sup>384</sup> and more with Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*, where gender plays a role in its own undoing, for 'one does not "do" one's gender alone. One is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary'.<sup>385</sup> Butler observes a practice 'for grasping the workings of fantasy construed not as a set of projections on an internal screen but as part of human relationality itself. It is on the basis of [psychoanalytic] insight that we can come to understand how fantasy is essential to an experience of one's own body, or that of

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Robert K. Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979).

<sup>385</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

another, as gendered'.<sup>386</sup> Duncan does not repress the fairy tale psychodrama but repurposes it, and reappropriates such for queer substitutions. Thus the fairy tale poetic is a redeployed performance; a technique not unlike Butler's resignification of Althusserian interpellation, since Duncan, in recognising the psychical subjectivation of the fairy tale, renders the fairy tale itself as a regime to restructure. The poetics of Duncan's fairy tale seek to manipulate the unconscious structures of fantasy in order to utilise gender relations as a generative construct for reality. As such, Duncan's fairy tale does not seem bound by Laplanchean fantasies of sexual roles, for example, since Duncan's poetic resists being determined by the unconscious, though Duncan still re-presents gendered fantasy. For Laplanche, fantasy can reveal itself through free-association or daydreams, but Duncan's poetic seems aware of its facilitation. The split symbolisations of gender thus surface as part of Duncan's unconscious history, but Duncan's re-assignment and re-deployment of the fairy tale is a process wherein his determined fantasy becomes queer in the making.<sup>387</sup> Such a creative process seems reconciliatory and therapeutic, but never complete. Indeed, the fairy tale becomes one of Duncan's most formative literary devices, in support for a queer movement towards psychical and social community.

Duncan's early poems and his model for appropriating the gendered 'fairy tale' narrative stem from a Lawrentian background, for in the above interview Duncan observes Lawrence trying to reinstate a similar sexual communitas. Duncan empathises with Lawrence's like desire for a 'conviviality' which could remain contingent to sexuality without being dependent upon the concept of 'sex'. The objectification of 'sex,' Duncan states, 'is what I think D.H. Lawrence found so abhorrent he was almost ready to dispense with loving,' since 'he was surrounded by people who loved him and by people he

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>387</sup> See Laplanche's 'Gender, Sex, and the sexual,' where Laplanche applies his Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (not explicitly mentioned in the article) to the formation of "gender" symbolization, which, Laplanche argues, comes before both sex and the sexual, influenced by the child's social unconscious (the external other, the parental, the socii), and yet gender is re-fashioned once teenage sexuality becomes a psychical influence. For Laplanche, gender is a signification process that is always already re-inscribing the en-gendered Past within the conscious experience of the present/future. Duncan also is re-creating the original fairy tale in the ongoing event of the poem, or fairy tale poetic. Jean Laplanche, trans Susan Fairfield. 'Gender, Sex, and the Sexual'. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 8:2, 201-219 (2007).

loved'.<sup>388</sup> Duncan was well aware of the bisexual communitisation Lawrence struggled with, for as early as 1949 Duncan worked with Jamie de Angulo, 'the very young man that D.H. Lawrence had fallen in love with' at Taos, notes Duncan.<sup>389</sup> Lawrence had at one time confessed his bisexuality to William Henry,<sup>390</sup> yet Howard Booth argues that Lawrence changes his position on bisexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality in tidal shifts that surface mostly as 'strategies to discipline his sexuality'.<sup>391</sup> Duncan also portrays Lawrence's struggle for a (bi)sexual accord as a quite exhausting yet restorative project. Critics such as Fiona Becket and Sanatan Bhowal confirm that gender conflicts remain the junction for Lawrence criticism,<sup>392</sup> and Mark Kinkead-Weekes's biography finds that Lawrence's struggle with gender differences was the locus of his poetics, since male-female confrontation in Lawrence seems 'more creative and transforming, if more difficult'.<sup>393</sup>

Unlike Duncan criticism, Lawrence scholarship tends to associate Lawrence's struggle with homosexuality with narcissistic shame, yet both Duncan and Lawrence distanced themselves from 'homosexuality' during a time of war and appealed to a politics of otherness. Lawrence's sudden fear of women and homophobia has been observed with the rise of WWI, particularly during his traumatic encounter with homosexuality at Cambridge in 1915.<sup>394</sup> After completing *The Rainbow* (1915), Lawrence visited Garnett

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>389</sup> Christopher Wagstaff, *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews with Robert Duncan, 1960-1985* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 234.

<sup>390</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph into Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 377-385.

<sup>391</sup> Howard Booth, 'D.H. Lawrence and Male Homosexual Desire,' *The Review of English Studies*, 53:209 (Feb, 2002), p. 106. Booth uses drafts of *Women in Love* to represent Lawrence's textual practices of sexual or self-management, as the narrator speaks for Birkin's bisexual conflicts: 'All the time, he recognized that, although he was always drawn to women, feeling more at home with a woman than man, yet it was for men that he felt the hot, flushing, roused attraction which a man is supposed to feel for the other sex,' and yet 'He never accepted the desire, and received it as part of himself' (98). Such an example hints at Lawrence's self-censorship, and yet Birkin's repression is not necessarily the narrator's, and Lawrence's changing position on bisexuality has often proven as difficult to pin down as Duncan suggests.

<sup>392</sup> Sanatan Bhowal, 'Lawrence and the Question of Gender in our Times,' *Études Lawrenciennes* 45 (2014), pp. 141-160.

<sup>393</sup> *Triumph in Exile*, p. 303.

<sup>394</sup> Cornelia Nixon, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and Turn Against Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Also see *Memoir of Maurice Magnus*.



and friends at Cambridge,<sup>395</sup> but after Keynes surprised Lawrence by acting out 'a nightmare of two men copulating,' this 'purblind sense of identification shocked Lawrence to the core'.<sup>396</sup> However, Kinkead-Weekes contextualises Lawrence's shock and conflict from 1913 through 1915 by implying that despite the homosexual-panic following Oscar Wilde's sentencing, Lawrence's working-class background was rather more repelled by the exclusivity of Cambridge's homosexual circles, who symbolised England's exclusive gay intelligentsia and artists. The narcissism of the Cambridge circle, concludes Kinkead-Weekes, was 'strikingly embodied in the *kind* of homosexual he encountered at the heart of English civilisation,' that is, at the time of the Great War.<sup>397</sup> Such a context puts Lawrence in a comparable frame with Duncan's WWII essay, 'The Homosexual in Society' (1944), where homosexuals themselves contain a 'problem more treacherous,' since they 'turned to a second outcast society as inhumane as the first'.<sup>398</sup> The gay-community's prideful exclusion of general humanity, as Duncan saw it, could not entreat outsiders for the sake of a more generative world, and neither could heteronormativity. He continues: 'Alone, not only I, but, I felt, the others who had appeared as I did so mocking, so superior in feeling, had known, knew still, those troubled emotions, the deep and integral longings that we as human beings feel, holding us from violate actions by the powerful sense of humanity that is their source, longings that lead us to love, to envision a creative life'.<sup>399</sup> Though Lawrence and Duncan are a world apart in their biographical and poetic practices of (homo)sexuality, Duncan's reading of Lawrence's own struggle to form a utopian community by managing gender and sexual difference reinforces Duncan's own creativity.

After relating to Lawrence's own fairy tale mission, Duncan's '76 interview exemplifies Lawrence's literary depictions of dueling genders as a vital poetic for queer identities, and Duncan does so by privileging Lawrence over Whitman or Shakespeare. 'Whitman imposes his own feeling for the male body over what is essentially a woman's position,' while 'Shakespeare and Lawrence were truly gifted in absorbing dual identities,'

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<sup>395</sup> Garnett, Duncan, Grant, [John Maynard] Keynes and Birrell.

<sup>396</sup> Michael Squires, *Living at the Edge: a Biography of D.H. Lawrence and Frieda Von Richthofen* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 119.

<sup>397</sup> *Triumph in Exile*, p. 305.

<sup>398</sup> *Collected Essays*, p. 10.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*

though Shakespeare 'did get caught in *Antony and Cleopatra* when he identifies with the Queen of the Nile. He usually doesn't "identify," but rather fully creates by entering the personas he creates. There's an important difference'.<sup>400</sup> Here Duncan stipulates the subtle yet vital difference between *identifying* or reinforcing gender and *creating* one. Duncan turns to Lawrence's *Women in Love* as an example. First Duncan imagines Lawrence creating a female character to confront his wife Frieda, but Duncan is then inclined to read Lawrence as both genders: 'I often read Lawrence amazed by his identity with the woman he copulates with; he is actually copulating with himself! These scenes are, for me, overpoweringly real. He's not created a man and a woman; he's created a kind of duplex Lawrence'.<sup>401</sup> And though Lawrence has 'much more range than what I've just said implies,' Duncan's own Lawrentian gender-poetic is introduced, which does not posit woman as a transcendental Other or imminent other to the male-subject, but works through the existential space such created binaries divulge. Though each of these male authors could be seen as appropriating the figure of woman for their own narcissistic projections, Duncan emphasises Lawrence's literary creation of 'man and woman' as a 'duplex Lawrence,' which cannot be reduced to a specific identity or sexual politic.

Duncan's fairy tale and readings of Lawrence can inform Duncan's wider reliance upon a gendered shaman to guide him through the creation process. The bisexual origin of Duncan's mythological poetry builds upon Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*<sup>402</sup> and Freud,<sup>403</sup> yet Christopher Beach has found Duncan's Freudian dependence upon 'woman' as part of a Lawrentian tradition: for Duncan, 'a vision of life that contains Eleusis must

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<sup>400</sup> Robert Duncan, Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan'. *Chicago Review*, 44:1 (1998), pp. 92-116, p. 110.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid, pp. 109-110.

<sup>402</sup> H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books: 2000). Blavatsky traces the elemental life forces to the 'bi-sexual,' evolving from the original 'dual sexes' or 'double-sexed deities.' In fact, the earliest religious symbols are in the least need of being interpreted, states Blavatsky, as they clearly signify deities that occupy both sexes, 'The Greek Zeus-Zen (aether), and Chthonia (the chaotic earth) and Metis (the water), his wives; Osiris and Isis-Latona—the former god representing also ether—the first emanation of the Supreme Deity' p. 156. She observes that the 'whole Darwin theory of natural selection is included in the first six chapters of the Book of Genesis,' as "'Man" of chapter i. is radically different from the "Adam" of chapter ii., for the former was created "male and female"—that is, bi-sexed—and in the image of God' p. 303.

<sup>403</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 171. 'Psycho-analysis has a common basis with biology, in that it presupposed an original bisexuality in human being (as in animals)'.

also include "the eroticism of D.H. Lawrence," the unconscious world opened up by Freud, and "the mire where Christ was born".<sup>404</sup> Beach reads Duncan's poem 'The Maiden' to show the centrality of guides like Ophelia, Rachel, Cora or Beatrice, who are less aligned with Pound's conception of the feminine than with the ascendable constructions of Dante, Whitman, Freud and Lawrence.<sup>405</sup> Though Maria Damon would no longer see Duncan's 'shamanistic' poetry in the 1950s as restricted to 'loss' or 'death,'<sup>406</sup> the admirable traits Damon observes in the '50s, such as the 'multiplicity of worlds' and 'constant change and transformation,' stem from the deep wounds and the resurrection of Duncan's earlier work.

Duncan's readings of *The Man Who Died* (*The Escaped Cock*) appear summative of such an en-gendered and vitalising experience. The novella was completed in 1929 when Lawrence's health faded into his final year, and the work was posthumously rumored to be dedicated to H.D., who was supposedly Christ's Isis in the story; an interpretation Duncan particularly fancied.<sup>407</sup> Imagining Lawrence's lover as either H.D. or Isis in the novella is only a preliminary step for Duncan, who persistently reads Lawrence as an irreducible identity created from both Isis and Christ, similar to how Duncan read *Women in Love*. Regarding *The Man Who Died*, Duncan writes in *The H.D. Book*:

We must take in earnest the Christ and priestess of Isis in Lawrence's story, even as their reality grows confusing upon the borderline of his story-telling and his being. Do they illustrate something he has to tell us, or do they impersonate his true being more intensely than his actual personality, as if Lawrence had his life in his writing? 'I have survived the day and the death of my interference, and am still a man.' Is this Christ, Lawrence? He indwells in his Christ, but also in his priestess of Isis in that

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<sup>404</sup> *ABC of Influence*, p. 153.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid*, p. 155.

<sup>406</sup> Maria Damon, *The Dark End of the Street: Margins in Vanguard American Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 148.

<sup>407</sup> *The H.D. Book*, p. 539.

story. He takes presence in what he creates for us.<sup>408</sup>

Duncan finds the tenets of his fairy tale poetic in the resurrection story of *The Man Who Died*, where the identity of an author and its lover can each perform multiple roles, and where one's dueling performances of gender can create new identities, for 'He takes presence in what he creates for us'. Duncan also stipulates that *The Man Who Died* offers a model for queer substitutions, where an otherwise 'unwomanly, unmanly' genius or the *daemon* can find a real sexual form: 'In sexual love between man and man, where there is creative genius, where the lovers have their daemons, there may be a counterpart to the Isis between the man and the woman in Lawrence's *The Man Who Died*'.<sup>409</sup> Duncan here seeks the 'creative genius' of homosexual male-relations, which perhaps feeds into the homosexual tradition Robert K. Martin observed in American poetry, where meaning is freed in non-reproductive love,<sup>410</sup> which Lawrence also invokes in his 'Whitman' essays. But Duncan does not reduce Lawrence to the male gender exclusively. In Duncan's eyes, Lawrence does not self-project onto his male characters only, as Barbara Shapiro would argue. Shapiro reads Lawrence's homosexual and (infantile) narcissistic-shame projected onto his eroticised masculine leaders, like General Cipriano, and onto male-homosexual scenes, as in the sick-room of *Aaron's Rod*, the naked wrestling in *Women in Love*, or bare-chested rituals in *The Plumed Serpent*.<sup>411</sup> Nor does Duncan read Lawrence as subjecting women characters to a repressed homosexuality, as Kate Millet, Eve Sedgwick or Cornelia Nixon have argued in Lawrence.<sup>412</sup> Rather, Duncan reads Lawrence as performing and working through each gender, to transform an alternative identity or relationality, thus offering a queer form of writing situated in conflict.

Before visiting the history behind Duncan's more explicit receptions of *The Man Who Died*, a reading of the story's central threads should first be introduced. From the outset, the narrative is pulled forward by the sense of another's touch, which in

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p. 488.

<sup>410</sup> *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry*, p. 176.

<sup>411</sup> Barbara Shapiro, *D.H. Lawrence and the Paradoxes of Psychological Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 13.

<sup>412</sup> Cornelia Nixon, *Lawrence's Leadership Politics and the Turn Against Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Lawrence's characterisation and metaphoric language becomes gendered. Such guidance and touch, however, is primarily a process of healing, and the driving 'wounds' and re-healing in the narrative will appear resonant with the shamanistic and resurrection poetry around Duncan's 'Toward the Shaman'. For example, Duncan's 'Persephone' will lead the poet towards the scene of 'Toward the Shaman,' and the poet in 'Persephone,' like Lawrence's wounded Christ, states that '*We have passed the Great Trauma. These wounds disclose our loss,*' and in 'Toward the Shaman,' the poet must 'pass thru' his 'loss' of 'N' (Ned Fabs) by returning to the 'wound,' for it is 'Because of this wound I return to this place'.<sup>413</sup> The structure of *The Man Who Died* and 'Toward the Shaman' return to their 'wounds,' but in returning and interrupting linear teleologies of fantasy, a queer form of resurrection is sustained.

*The Man Who Died* reimagines a Nietzschean Christ who is humanised by discovering his own sexual body,<sup>414</sup> though the story is mainly one of healing. As discussed earlier in the Olson chapter, the scenes of Christ carrying a rooster invoke the myth of Asclepius, but *The Man Who Died* is not conclusively or climactically healed, nor is his primal need to heal operating from an imagined or desired future; rather, the narrative is driven by the continuous re-opening of the man's 'wounds,' thus a resurrection *in continuum* rather than completion. *The Man Who Died* begins *in medias res*, with a sudden force moving Christ's desireless body out from a cave: 'desire was dead in him, even for food or drink. He had risen without desire, without even the desire to live, empty save for the all-overwhelming disillusion that lay like nausea where his life had been. Yet perhaps, deeper even than disillusion, was a desireless resoluteness, deeper even than consciousness'.<sup>415</sup> Although he 'had no desire in him, not even to move,' the undead man does not return to his Father's work, but escapes civilisation, seeing 'the world again bright as glass [though] he was not of it, for desire had failed'.<sup>416</sup> The man 'without desire' is nevertheless pushed onward, and is so, as we will see, from an gendered sense of 'light'. As seen in my Olson chapter, particularly in regards to 'Part I' of *The Man Who Died*, the sexual atmosphere gripping Christ takes on a sensual femininity which Christ's

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>414</sup> see section on Olson and *The Escaped Cock*.

<sup>415</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 169.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

formerly de-sexualised and broken body had lacked. In 'Part II,' Christ finds himself naked with Isis. Yet even with Isis, desire is passing, for when 'he touched her with the poignancy of wonder, and the marvellous piercing transcendence of desire,' their desire is immediately appropriated into the narrative's metaphorical chain of re-wounding and re-healing. After intercourse, the man does not move towards any desire except to remain in the touch of sun, in the 'fullness of touch, he slept in his cave while the dawn came,' but when Isis needs to return to her mother and Osiris, Christ says, 'Let not your heart be troubled,' for 'I have died the death once,' and he continues a state of dying that undermines a teleological desire.<sup>417</sup> 'He would go alone, with his destiny. Yet not alone, for the touch would be upon him, even as he left his touch on her. And invisible suns would go with him'.<sup>418</sup> The narrative heads into the dawn's touch, but the atmosphere's touch is always already a touch upon him, and yet that touch has been left behind at the same time. A reading of the novella can therefore focus upon the dis-orienting movement propelled by the sense of guidance brought upon his wounds.

The continuous resurrection of 'the man who died' is driven by his 'wounds' and the healing force of 'touch,' the touch of the sun or the other's body. In the beginning, the man awakens with piercing wounds and immediately gravitates towards the light, awakened with 'inner nausea' as 'he leaned forward, in that narrow well of rock, and leaned frail hands on the rock near the chinks of light'.<sup>419</sup> Both the text and 'the man who died' appear out of a trauma never introduced yet tended to through its 'wounds,' as such dehiscence preoccupies the form of narrative and text. Even upon touching Isis the man's wounds re-open, sacrificing again any restorative telos. From the outset, the man is driven by touch's remedy, as when exiting his tomb, 'the sun and subtle salve of spring healed his wounds, even the gaping world of disillusion',<sup>420</sup> and yet touch forms his body by opening it up to the world as well: "'I am alone within my own skin, which is the walls of all my domain.'" So he healed of his wounds, and enjoyed his immortality of being alive without fret,<sup>421</sup> but soon 'the nausea of the old wound broke out afresh'.<sup>422</sup> The form

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p. 180.

of the text and 'the man who died' is arguably circuitous, for 'He looked at the woman, and lost his breath. And his wounds, and especially the death-wound through his belly, began to cry again'.<sup>423</sup> In 'Part II,' Isis witnesses his body's perpetual re-healing through its en-gendered consummation of touch but also its continual dying. She observes, 'What was torn becomes a new flesh, what was a wound is full of fresh life; this scar is the eye of the violet, [and yet he] winced, and absorbed his life again, as thousands of times before'.<sup>424</sup> The text is repetitious in re-healing and re-opening the wounds but it certainly does not explicate such undying 'thousands of times'; therefore the text presents but a glimpse of the undying wounds which are more frequently recurring outside of the text, yet such sign-postings further underline the narrative process throughout.

If not already evident, I find the dehiscence in *The Man Who Died* a working paradox, as the re-wounding ties together a narrative while disrupting its progressive work. But while the body is being re-opened, so too is the self experiencing change. Healing the self is therefore also a severing of self, a re-wounding to reinforce a sense of identity in the body. Lawrence and Duncan's wounds seek touch while being touched by their guide, bestowing agency to neither the subject nor its other, but to the flesh in its re-opening. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor similarly describe the 'flesh' of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm as 'a new concept of narcissism,' because 'the flesh accomplishes its narcissism only by separating itself into two "parts"—because it *is* this "dehiscence"—it cannot see itself seeing, touch itself touching,<sup>425</sup> and yet 'A flesh that is its dehiscence ensures that its elements are, and remain, the same and yet are, and remain, fundamentally different from one another'.<sup>426</sup> The splitting of Lawrence's 'wounds' (and the later 'return' of Duncan's 'wound'), and the feminine touch of healing, interrupt the teleology of an underlying fantasy that would otherwise control a coherent body.

Madhavi Menon's 'Spurning Teleology' and Carla Freccero's 'Queer Times' reflect the concerns for linear futurisms in queer theory, and Lee Edelman's readings of

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>423</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 203.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>425</sup> Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), pp. 10-11.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

erotohistory, anachronism and the death-drive were foundational for such paradigms.<sup>427</sup> Edelman's *No Future* had observed that political positions in general (Right or Left) had defined themselves by projecting a future for the children, an implicit desire for reproduction, and thus, in resisting the imaginary teleology of (hetero)normative politics, Edelman offers a queer politic of refusal. The chiasmic dehiscence in *The Man Who Died*, or at least in Duncan's context, is comparable to the concept of *sinthomosexuality* in Edelman's *No Future*. Edelman's neologism adapts Lacan's 'sinthome' from *Seminar XXIII*, where Lacan renders his former linguistic 'symptom' as a more unanalysable term for, or trace of, an interrupting gesture within a subject's fantasy for the Other's desire, thus a bodily gesture which appears within the symbolic structuration or narration of that fantasy. Edelman observes *sinthomosexuality* as interrupting fantasy, and the writing of *The Man Who Died* certainly appears as fantasy, but one that has no imagined beginning or end, and unfolds by being interrupted. The unrecognisable occurrence of the returning wound of *sinthomosexuality*, Edelman writes, 'would assert itself instead *against* futurity, *against* its propagation, insofar as it would designate an impasse in the passage to the future and, by doing so, would pass beyond, pass *through*, the saving fantasy futurity denotes'.<sup>428</sup> A *sinthomosexuality* is 'denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of futurity that mends each tear, however mean, in reality's dress with threads of meaning [and] offers us fantasy turned inside out, the seams of its costume exposing reality's seamless as mere seeming, the fraying knots that hold each sequin in place now usurping that place'.<sup>429</sup> Edelman's focus on the textual apolitics of *sinthomosexuality* seek to avoid gender biases and skips close-readings of gender specifically,<sup>430</sup> which causes friction in any simple juxtaposition of *sinthomosexuality* and the consummation of Lawrence's Christ, but the point here is that such frictions also resonate in Duncan's poetics. Put more clearly, *The Man Who Died* and Duncan's early shamanism appropriate

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<sup>427</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 9. Also see Madhavi Menon's 'Spurning Teleology,' Heather Love, *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Carla Freccero's 'Queer Times' in *After Sex?: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, ed. Janet Halley, Andrew Parker.

<sup>428</sup> *No Future*, p. 33.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p. 165.



a gendered fantasy, or the fairy tale, but do so in disrupting the text's narrative with a bodily form.

In order to put Lawrence into such a queer context of un-dying through Duncan, a history of Duncan's readings of *The Man Who Died* provide a gateway, opening up a wider history of Duncan's reliance upon women in order to heal himself, biographically and literally. Duncan's literary passion and sexual identity were reared through the Lawrentian tutelage of his high school teacher, Edna Keough, who discreetly gave Duncan her copy of *The Man Who Died* and personified a Lawrentian role herself, acting as a woman and mothering guide for Duncan, inciting Duncan to 'read all I could of Lawrence'.<sup>431</sup> Duncan eventually developed a 'love' for Keough<sup>432</sup> while she constructed what Duncan called a 'community of feeling' between herself and the literature of Lawrence, Woolf and H.D., of which Lawrence occupied the single male-role among women. And it was 'Not before Robert read H.D., Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence,' writes Faas, that 'this "dis-ease" converted into genuine creativity, and here again his teacher played the role of initiator'.<sup>433</sup> Keough was herself a writer pursuant of Lawrentian coteries. She had met Robinson Jeffers and Ella Young, who then encouraged Keough to visit Dorothy Brett at Lawrence's ranch in Taos where she partied at Mabel Dodge Luhan's with Frieda and Frieda's Italian lover. And 'on vacations from college, she had gone to Carmel and to Taos,' wrote Duncan, 'because Jeffers and Lawrence were there, that she had been to their places was part of her story. The fame of the poet was an actual presence or power for her, a charm'.<sup>434</sup> Keough appears to subscribe to what Horace Gregory would approvingly called the 'Jeffers–D.H. Lawrence cult',<sup>435</sup> and before long Keough noticed Duncan's 'talkative and flamboyant manner,' notes Faas, soon giving Duncan personal copies of *The Man Who Died* and Woolf's *The Waves* after class, but doing so 'with some hesitation and decision that gave the lending or reading aloud an

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<sup>431</sup> *The H.D. Book*, p. 76.

<sup>432</sup> Ekbert Faas, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society* (Berkeley: Black Sparrow Press, 1984), p. 43. Keough recollected, 'Robert told me later that he was in love with me but I had no idea of that at the time.' p. 43.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

<sup>434</sup> *The H.D. Book*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>435</sup> Horace Gregory, 'Poet Without Critics: A Note On Robinson Jeffers'. *American Critical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 71.

importance,' wrote Duncan later.<sup>436</sup> *The Man Who Died*, like Duncan's own rehearsal under Keough, is a narrative of a gradually resurrecting man who does not have an identity but is taught by his spiritual and sexual guide, Isis, within a temple of female servants. Keough, in this case, resembles the (M)other figure whom Duncan would both lust, love, and study under, as Duncan reflected, 'What I was to be grew in what she was'.<sup>437</sup> Lawrence and 'the man who died' resemble the young Duncan, taught within the hermetic narrative of Keough's temple of women. H.D. had proved inspiring, but, Duncan recalls, 'Not because I read everything H.D. wrote, as I read all that I could of Lawrence in those years'.<sup>438</sup> Keough also saw the effect Duncan's readings had on his development, stating, 'It wasn't designed at all although I have often wondered if some of the more erotic pieces I lent him contributed to his blossoming homosexuality'.<sup>439</sup> Duncan's education would relate to a Lawrentian paradigm of an en-gendered community-making, and would aid the young poet in the crises ahead.

After high school, Duncan's dependence upon women, as mothers and lovers, grew, but grew along with his Lawrentian coteries, accompanying what soon became a resurrecting poetic. Duncan spent a 'brief interlude' at Berkeley,<sup>440</sup> where he quickly formed a small 'company of women',<sup>441</sup> and after an even briefer stay at Black Mountain College, where Duncan was kicked-out the following morning, Duncan moved to Annapolis where his first homosexual boyfriend, Ned Fahs, was teaching. Their breakup, however, exacerbated Duncan's already worrisome instability, sending him into a reckless lifestyle in New York City. But his sexual politics and sense of community began to find direction when living with Jeff and Connie Rall, the communal anarchists in New York City, where Duncan's readings of Lawrence and *The Man Who Died* resurface. From the Ralls's Duncan wrote to James Cooney, the founder of a Lawrence colony in Woodstock, NY, and editor of *The Phoenix* magazine, which had published its apocalyptic mission-statement in *The New York Times Book Review* in July 1937: *The*

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<sup>436</sup> *The H.D. Book*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>439</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 43.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>441</sup> Lisa Jarnot, *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 47. The 'company of women' consisted of Lillian Fabilli, Cecily Kramer, Virginia Admiral, Ida Bear, Janet Thurman and Pauline Kael.

*Phoenix* 'will give voice, through serialized novels, short stories, essays and poetry, to writers who believe in the truths that D.H. Lawrence propagated, and who are seeking, as he did, to bring about the beginnings of a new way of life by which men may deliver themselves from the fatal debris of this crumbling Christian civilization, with its deadly drift toward fascism and Marxian communism'.<sup>442</sup> Lisa Jarnot's biography passes over Duncan's initial correspondence with Cooney but notes that 'Duncan's friendship with the Cooneys brought a new sense of family,' while 'Blanche Cooney provided the pleasure of female companionship that had been so critical in his Berkeley life'.<sup>443</sup> In this critical phase, Duncan's financial and emotional dependencies upon his stepmother, Minnehaha, along with Virginia Admiral, Marjorie McKee, Blanche Cooney, and soon Anaïs Nin at *The Phoenix*, represent a reliance upon women and mother-figures that is also a poetic found in Lawrence.

Duncan soon felt his own political and sexual crises become representative of the dying State, and, like Lawrence who saw the sexual violence of narcissism underpinning World War I, Duncan correlated the shadow of World War II with the sexually impulsive psychodramas of New York. It is this merging, of political, sexual and social resurrection at *The Phoenix*, that would also construct the Lawrentian gestures leading into Duncan's 'Toward the Shaman'. His anarchism and sexual politics increasingly gravitated towards *The Phoenix* community, and he declared a coming resurrection to Cooney in 1939: 'I, who live in the cities, these cities of the east that I see already towering to the burial catastrophic year, from their fire will spring the Phoenix— revolution is a mild, a colorless and distorted in the millions of clerks and strong raphers? In these cities will burst into flame—already in individuals it bursts into flame and there is insanity and revelation and among the strong the marching of new prophets D.H. Lawrence, Jeffers, Eliot, St. John Perse'.<sup>444</sup> Duncan would next move to *The Phoenix*, where he reflected upon its crucial respite and the vital role *The Man Who Died* continued to play in his transformation. He wrote to Cooney: 'When one searches for LIFE, for the living fire in the city it is to go into the dead body of the Phoenix,' and 'into the corpse ashes to find the firebirth that will tear loose at the beginning of the AGE,' for 'I must admit I had an attack of it myself and

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<sup>442</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 67.

<sup>443</sup> *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*, p. 66.

<sup>444</sup> 'The Phoenix Collection: 1938--1945'. SUNY, Buffalo, Poetry Collection.

thot I was a goner,' but a 'Clue to a resurrection [is] In the feast of the Titans. In the death and torture of the Christdeath (The Escaped Cock, Lawrence)'.<sup>445</sup> Duncan envisions his own life as *The Escaped Cock* (*The Man Who Died*) since Duncan would similarly escape a decadent modernity as 'the man who died' does, yet Duncan simultaneously sought to restore his sexual and poetic identity as well, like 'the man who died'. His letter continues: 'I remember how I just [sic] for the Phoenix when Ned and I were in New York it was the energy, [...] a strength that I had first sensed when in High School my English teacher had given me Lawrence's Man Who Died to read— and that was the force I tapped in writing then— the thing that made writing real'.<sup>446</sup> It was during this transition from Fahs to *The Phoenix*, and the need for resurrection therein, that Duncan began his crucial poem 'Toward the Shaman,' writing to Cooney immediately after the break-up with Fahs, 'I will be able to pay you \$40 a month to feed, bed and to teach me something about printing while I will be working on my SHAMAN'.<sup>447</sup> In these most early years, 'Toward the Shaman' would be worked over throughout the crises of Duncan's sexual and poetic struggles, with *The Man Who Died* in context.

Duncan's incipient poetics of resurrection, in and around 'Toward the Shaman,' became grounded by both the gendered conviviality at *The Phoenix* Colony and by Cooney's specific editorial demand for resurrection poetry. Duncan would later recall that *The Phoenix* instilled an 'assertion of kindred spirit,' where, he wrote, 'I found my destined creative work in my art'.<sup>448</sup> *The Phoenix* 'remains a germinal point,' and 'So much of my inner being,' Duncan continues, 'has continued from and return again and again to the inspiration of Blake and Lawrence that I always feel a "literary" kinship".<sup>449</sup> Cooney and Duncan would disagree over Pound's significance but reconcile through a shared 'Lawrentian opinion,' since 'Pound shared Lawrence's conviction that man's relation with the welfare of the earth had to do with his relation to his own sexuality'.<sup>450</sup> As editor and mentor, Cooney pushed certain Lawrentian forms of resurrection upon Duncan's earliest poetry, admonishing poems which, in Cooney's words, had 'too much of

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<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 65.

<sup>448</sup> 'The Phoenix Collection: 1938--1945'. SUNY, Buffalo, Poetry Collection.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

the dying bird' while lauding lines that were 'communicating a point of contact near the Phoenix'.<sup>451</sup> The September 1939 issue of *The Phoenix*, for example, contained Duncan's poem 'The Gestation,' which, on the one hand, embraces a pathos and apocalypticism—expressed in Duncan's despairing letters from New York City—and, on the other, concludes with a resurrection fit for Cooney. 'Gestation' is a staple for Duncan's resurrection, one through a shaman guide, as it already utilises an early form of gendered touch when inserting a same-sex dynamic; a touch that solicits the wounds of loss driving resurrection:

And he grasps my hand  
and I grasp his hand  
sensing the strength that was lost  
and the seed of new strength from despair.<sup>452</sup>

'The Gestation' is true to its title, as 'Toward the Shaman' would grow out of it. Faas gives context to 'The Gestation' by adding that 'Living with the Cooneys after the breakup with Ned enhanced this sense of life as a shamanic quest through the unknown territories of the soul',<sup>453</sup> yet the poem also tends towards a non-linear or non-teleological resurrection of undying that Duncan's poetry would soon develop.

The first line of 'The Gestation' begins, 'I have gone down to the beach,' invoking the opening line of Pound's 'Canto I,' 'And then went down to the ship,' and Duncan's present-perfect tense, 'have gone,' places the poem *in medias res* like Pound's conjunction 'And'.<sup>454</sup> Like *The Man Who Died* and Pound, the narrative initially appears suspended in time. Duncan's transformation in 'The Gestation' is more rushed than in later poems, but its opening need for a feminine guide to walk him through his resurrection is a definitive trait of Duncan's early work. In 'The Gestation' he begins: 'I have gone down to the beach | where green in this light of this moon | and huge in the shadow of this land | the host

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<sup>451</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 69.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

<sup>454</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 7.

lies'.<sup>455</sup> The allusive 'host' is initially introduced as genderless upon the poet's dire quest, but soon the guide emerges from the apocalyptic scene as male, and a male now giving the 'seed' of touch among the 'lusting' atmosphere:

Away from the towering fungus corpse  
from the dunes to the broad shore  
and he comes with me.

The insect race is behind,  
creeps blindly on the carcase of the host  
and creaks minutely.

Churp! crack! the sound of crickets  
lusting in the wilderness.<sup>456</sup>

As we'll see in 'Toward the Shaman' and other early poems, the poet remains anonymous, like 'the man who died,' but is led by a gendered guide towards resurrection. *The Man Who Died* had concluded its journey by entering the physical womb of 'Space,' and Duncan's poet in 'The Gestation' will also return to the womblike arms of the 'sea'. After leaving his own guide, Isis, 'the man who died' entered but another form of Space: 'How it leans around me, and I am part of it, the great rose of Space. I am like a grain of its perfume, and the woman is a grain of its beauty. Now the world is one flower of many petalled darknesses, and I am in its perfume as in a touch'.<sup>457</sup> In Duncan's 'The Gestation,' the poet is similarly led to stand on the precipice of the womblike abyss that will envelope, touch and heal him as he passes through: 'waiting, | and the sea comes roaring at our feet | out of the womb the waters roaring hissing up in many voices | with tendril arms extending'.<sup>458</sup> The resurrecting space of the 'womb' in 'The Gestation' (and 'Toward the Shaman') is a trope Duncan also used at that time to describe the feeling of returning

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<sup>455</sup> Robert Duncan, *The Collected Early Poems and Plays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), p. 118.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

<sup>457</sup> *St. Mawr and The Man Who Died*, p. 208.

<sup>458</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 120.

to Marjorie McKee's bed after intervals of homosexual ventures. Writing to his homosexual lover Paul, Duncan states that going back into McKee's bed was 'the womb period'.<sup>459</sup> Duncan and Lawrence each part ways with their imminent guide to move forward, but by returning to a maternal realm. The Allwomb of the sea, which Duncan's poet works towards in 'The Gestation' (and 'Toward the Shaman') is a Lawrentian movement towards 'the great rose of Space,' as both embody a feminine space: Lawrence's man and woman are both grains in the feminine 'rose of Space,' while Duncan and his male guide are left before 'the tendril arms of the sea'. The ensemble of male and female guides, and the ultimate trope of the Mother, carries Duncan's poet and the 'insect race' of 1939, in its 'lusting' wilderness, towards a never achieved end.

At *The Phoenix*, Duncan's poetry was soon nurtured by Anaïs Nin's more skillful approach to a transformative sexuality, and her influence in Duncan's poetry can hardly be understated.<sup>460</sup> Upon arriving in the US and *The Phoenix*, Nin's *D.H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study* (1932) had made her a renowned Lawrentian. Nin had praised Lawrence's ability to adopt female voices and positions, particularly through female sexuality.<sup>461</sup> In Lawrence, Nin observes a female desire, among other traits: 'He had complete realization of the feelings of women. In fact, very often he wrote as a woman would write. It is a well-known fact that a critic attributed *The White Peacock* to a woman'.<sup>462</sup> Nin goes on to show passages in *Women in Love*, *Kangaroo* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and thus periods throughout Lawrence's career, that are given over to a woman's perspective. Like Duncan, Nin had read Lawrence as exploring multiple gender identities rather than projecting one, and by September 1940, Duncan had already

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<sup>459</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 107.

<sup>460</sup> Nin arrived soon after Henry Miller, who joined *The Phoenix* immediately after Cooney had published his mission-statement. Miller responded by describing his own work on Lawrence, having just finished a draft of *The World of D.H. Lawrence: A Passionate Appreciation* (which was obsessively redrafted until 1980). Miller quickly became the Paris correspondent for *The Phoenix*, and Nin soon joined, who was currently helping Miller with *The World of D.H. Lawrence*.

<sup>461</sup> Anaïs Nin, *D.H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study* (London: Black Spring Press, 1956). Criticism on Lawrence was in turn redirected by Nin, for up until her book, *D.H. Lawrence: An Unprofessional Study* in 1932, only critical biographies of Lawrence had been published by those most eager to capitalise on and embellish personal narratives, while Nin's timely study, two years after Lawrence's death, was the first to provide close-readings of his *oeuvre*.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

found the 'same dynamics of love' in Nin's story 'Birth' as in Lawrence's work.<sup>463</sup> According to a letter which Duncan had written to Nin that December, it was *House of Incest* and Nin's Lawrentian tendencies that had 'also inspired 'Toward the Shaman'.<sup>464</sup> When Nin arrived at *The Phoenix*, Duncan pounced on her mentorship, and soon she taught Duncan the strict practice of journal-writing, which was meant to be both a therapeutic and creative space for the unsettled and formidable poet. Nin would supply critical feedback. After sharing his poetry, Nin would give acute criticism through an exchange of diaries. She cautioned Duncan against Cooney's doctrine of explicit rebirth by stressing her own 'transmutation':

What you have shown me I call prose. Poetry is a transmutation. It cannot be so direct. It is not the primitive images I object to, but even a penis in primitive myths becomes different, a symbol. In your poetry you reach this at times, at other times you do not. Some of it is too clear, too direct. It is not an issue between vulgarity and style, colloquialism and literature, but a matter of atmosphere and transmutation [...] Poetry is the myth created out of human elements. In the 'Maze' poem it seems to me you were successful. Don't misunderstand me. I do not wish to eliminate daily language but untransmuted reality.<sup>465</sup>

Hearing word of Nin's surgical treatment of Duncan and Miller, Kenneth Patchen next sought Nin's advice, but Nin saw only 'perpetual suicide and no rebirth' in Patchen.<sup>466</sup> At this juncture, one can observe Duncan's particular Lawrentian poetic being formed between Patchen's despair, Cooney's direct resurrection, and Nin's sexual transmutation.

Duncan's early poem 'The Protestants' also builds gendered relations towards the phoenix-image. The poem was composed as a canto, 'Canto One,' and was paired with 'The Gestation' in '39 when published in *The Phoenix*. 'The Protestants' begins with a

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<sup>463</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 72.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>465</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1939-1944* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969), p. 19.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.



gaze upon a woman walking: 'In her retreat | the slattern female winces up her face | and screws a smile for silence, | accepts with shifty eyes your challenge'.<sup>467</sup> Here the woman's challenging silence brings the poet into an apocalyptic realm, with 'Fire coming upon such a world, | from such things will make a test'.<sup>468</sup> The burning despair, however, folds over at the poem's midriff with a Lawrentian interregnum:

The Times. The News. A million books.  
Coupons. tickets. food for fireburn.  
Phoenix rising from the ash heap –  
birdfire from bundles – old clothes<sup>469</sup>

From the desolation of 'furniture broken and broken teeth | and with her hair streaming fire,' 'a woman approaches, entirely nude, | her body stone white from the age of stone, | and a wolf at her side'.<sup>470</sup> The woman is stripped to nakedness, and the Dantean scene stages a Lawrentian fairy tale of resurrection. Here the woman becomes the poet's guide, a 'Demon' who 'walks beside me,' guiding the boy 'from the caverns of this world' into the next. It is not just the sexual and poetic identity of the poet who must be guided towards resurrection by woman, but Duncan's need for 'woman' and society's need for conviviality. In 'The Protestants,' the poet and his demon-guide 'would pass this place' of destruction, where 'Such sounds of poverty will make, | such voices as the poor contain | eyes thru smoke and idle hands | in protest. Banners. Fists. | I pass on thru the gates of Hell'.<sup>471</sup> Duncan emphasised the poem's theme of 'Phoenix fire' and 'rebirth' to Cooney,<sup>472</sup> but Duncan's closing phrase—to 'pass on thru'—is an early sign and recurring phrase for Duncan's transformative continuance rather than concluding rebirth.

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<sup>467</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 120.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 121.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>472</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 70. Letter to Cooney, concerning 'The Protestants': 'the entrance into the Inferno of the city. Somewhere in that city the Firebird will be found. Already tho' the whole city burns with the Phoenix fire, to be melted, to ashes and then the rebirth'.

Faas duly notes Cooney's strong hand in Duncan's earliest poems, but Faas does so in order to introduce Duncan's departure from Cooney in poems like 'We Have Forgotten Venus' and 'Persephone,' where Duncan avoids Cooney's 'PHOENIX poetry' and leaves behind 'Eliotish formulas' and 'Lawrentian afterthoughts about rebirth'.<sup>473</sup> However, Faas throws Lawrence out with Cooney's bathwater. It is clear that Duncan's poetry is anxiously and steadily finding its own form, yet Duncan's development appears more free to receive Lawrence without Cooney rather than freed by disowning Lawrence altogether. Faas's chapter 'From Phoenix to Ritual' abandons Lawrence when outlining the transition from Cooney into Duncan's editorial projects at *The Phoenix*. However, Duncan's *Ritual* and *Experimental Review* (1940-41) kept Lawrence as a cornerstone, which Clement Greenberg witnessed when reviewing *Experimental Review*, albeit negatively.<sup>474</sup> In addition, Duncan's indicative poem 'Ritual' seems to render an even more pronounced Lawrentian resurrection, one now integrating word repetition, which is a defining trait of Duncan's '47 collection. In 'Ritual' Duncan writes,

Memory of things forgotten,  
memory of youth desired, and wasted, gone.  
The tired ones came to sleep, and those  
came too who could not sleep  
because of dreams, disturbed by visions,  
words from cities,  
words from words from words from cities <sup>475</sup>

Here a journey from an apocalyptic city is rehearsed, and the repetition of 'words from cities' resignifies a gradual change in meaning out from which the poet will emerge from the city of despair. The next section of 'Ritual,' called 'The Sacrifice,' begins by already

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>474</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 88. In Greenberg's 'The Renaissance of the Little Mag,' Duncan's *Experimental Review* exudes 'a flavor of cult,' making harsh note of its apparent cult figures: 'there are saints living and dead: D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Rexroth, Patchen, and the editor's private saint, St. John Perse'.

<sup>475</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 112.

'returning' to old 'forms,' enacting a compulsion to repeat which produces change, 'the new phoenix' therein, one reborn in new 'flesh':

Where had the forms gone, now returned,  
where burned, now springing from ashes  
the new phoenix,  
bloody,  
tearing of flesh

And the doors swung back. <sup>476</sup>

'Ritual' transmutes the Lawrentian narrative of rebirth and phoenix-imagery into a new form that will become a serialised ritual. Rather than outlining a resurrection within a single poem, the post-'Ritual' poems work through a resurrecting movement that is shared but also carried across poems, therefore deferring acute progression or climax. The serial form would become a defining feature of Duncan's later poetics, but I also see the early serialisation of resurrection as part of a longer journey that requires a gendered, feminised guide, among a gendered constellation of figures, in order to sustain a prolonged narrative and develop its multiphasic stages.

The poet and his society are transformed serially through subsequent poems such as 'Persephone,' 'Passage Over Water' and 'Toward the Shaman,' which rely on a male and female guide to help the poet pass through the wounds of loss. In 'Persephone,' Duncan presents what he calls the 'autohypnotic evocation of a world in which gods and elemental beings moved,' that which he 'loved' in Pound,<sup>477</sup> and such mythological invocations follow a communal 'we' of the poem as 'our wounds,' which are 'barely healed,' 'wait' for the touch of the rising sun, like *The Man Who Died*. 'Persephone,' who is 'Lost, lost such peace and Persephone lost,' begins with the epigraph, '*We have passed the Great Trauma. These wounds disclose our loss,*' and though the 'we' is never discerned, 'we' alludes to a necessary other who aids the poet's resurrecting search to heal

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

those 'wounds'.<sup>478</sup> The poem's precise emphasis on the 'wounds' of 'loss' and the impending 'death-threatening dream' which comes from losing Persephone nevertheless look to the sunrise, before continuing that search in the subsequent poem, 'Passage Over Water' (the river Styx).

'Passage Over Water' signals a poetic later matured in Duncan's serialised 'Passages' in the '60s, including 'Rites of Passage' in *Ground Work: Before the War* (discussed later). Lisa Jarnot notes that 'Passage Over Water' from *The Years As Catches* is contextualised by the deterioration of Duncan's relationship with Fahs,<sup>479</sup> which places the poem's wounds with Duncan's expressed need for a Lawrentian resurrection. 'Passage Over Water' provides a bridge from one poem to another, but does so by tracking the poet's 'fairy tale' ascension. In 'Passage Over Water,' the 'we' of 'Persephone' continues, beginning with 'We have gone out in boats upon the sea at night, | lost'.<sup>480</sup> The serial poem already locates boundaries in order to cross them, as the lost Persephone is what concretises a sense of 'us' and the boundaries of different worlds, demarcating the poet's proximity to healing its loss: 'our love like a knife between us | defining the boundaries that we can never cross | nor destroy as we drift into the heart of our dream, | cutting the silence, slyly, the bitter rain in our mouths | and the dark wound closed in behind us'.<sup>481</sup> In ramping up for 'Toward the Shaman,' the lost Persephone becomes rather a guide for restoring the loss of the poet's homosexual lover, to close the 'dark wound' which never heals. Though the 'wound' is being amended, as 'Passage Over Water' concludes 'over the wastelands westward,' 'alone' but 'within the indestructible night,' the unbridgeable boundaries that Duncan locates between lovers is exactly what drives his crossing of boundaries in the following poem, 'Toward the Shaman,' which will replace the poet's guide and lost love with male figures, further rendering the poet's dehiscence as loss into a resurrecting form.

'Toward the Shaman' was published in the *Experimental Review*, no. 2, in 1940, and was trimmed down for *The Years As Catches*.<sup>482</sup> When introducing the collection

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<sup>478</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 12.

<sup>479</sup> Robert Duncan, *The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*, p. 65.

<sup>480</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 13.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> 'Toward the Shaman' was cut from Duncan's abandoned novel, *The Shaman*.

upon its republication in 1966, Duncan again returns to the defining crisis of his relationship with Ned, the 'first experience of a sexual relationship [that] took over my life'.<sup>483</sup> Duncan therefore introduces the collection and poem by first returning to the primal scene upon which his archetypal gender narrative would be staged, and he continues by introducing that he was, at the time, 'moved by violent conflicts and yearnings, a need to be reassured in love that all but obscured any expression of loving,'<sup>484</sup> where 'the opposites playd in me: male and female, love and hate,' as much as 'hope and fear,'<sup>485</sup> yet such binaries are 'evershifting,' 'giving rise anew':

I have come not to resolve or to eliminate any of the old conflicting elements of my work but to imagine them now as contrasts of a field of composition in which I develop an evershifting possibility of the poet I am – at once a made up thing and at the same time a depth in which my being is – the poems not ends in themselves but forms arising from the final intention of the whole in which they have their form and in turn giving rise anew.<sup>486</sup>

In 'Toward the Shaman,' the fairy tale roles transmute into homosexual identities and a queer form of narrative, where resurrection is maintained by returning to the poet's wounds. Ultimately the poet will 'pass thru' the 'cave,' through its 'wound' of 'loss,' and into the original sea, in a resurrecting identity that does not reach completion. The 'conflicting elements' Duncan introduces for the collection drive 'Toward the Shaman' as well, not only in the contrasts between the light and dark, or its dialogic 'we,' but in a resurrection beyond the apocalypse, through 'hope and fear'.

A communal 'we' begins the poem once more by opening the wounds of the lovers's mouths, 'as we open our mouths upon each other: a building falls,' and the lovers of the apocalyptic city are already thrown into a journey towards the resurrecting 'sea' or 'Allwomb,' as the opening line continues: 'a building falls; flowers open into the

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<sup>483</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 3.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

consuming eye of the moon where | rivers run to the sea, lunar, dark waters, movement of fish as thru mucous'.<sup>487</sup> However, like Lawrence's Christ in *The Man Who Died*, the poet must escape the apocalyptic city of the Father's Law in order to be resurrected in the womb of space. 'Toward the Shaman' continues by recognising that in this destructive city, 'They have cast a shadow of destruction upon us – the Police raid at twelve,' as 'The Beast is back. And the | Judge, omnipotent, unjust, sits at the entrance of Allwomb tracing the scars of guilt across our faces'.<sup>488</sup> The piercing Law of 'the man who died' also forsakes Duncan's poet, tracing 'scars of guilt' that both Lawrence and Duncan must redress by reforming the sexual politics violated within.

Written under the shadow of World War II, the 'us' moves through a war-torn city which now evokes imagery from *Revelations*, as a 'pregnant' 'child of twelve' walks by, surrounded by 'horns blowing, brass and screaming into the night, in the far rooms of sudden death'.<sup>489</sup> The 'we' works through the destructive Law and death, 'dance bombs dropping into the open and flames in the great cities | dance wombs broken open with violence',<sup>490</sup> a violence that will nevertheless lead to the ocean.

As the 'we' passes the initial destruction, the poet suddenly becomes an 'I' who must pass through the 'lower kingdoms' of his guide, like 'the man who died,' in order to reach the 'Allwomb' of the sea: '*It is thru you that I prepare for the sea*'.<sup>491</sup> In this case, however, the poet's guide is now revealed as male. Replacing the female demon and naked woman in 'Persephone' with a male body now named 'Joseph,' Duncan also presents a pastiche of Christ and Isis, as Duncan's poet finds his own form through consummation with 'Joseph': 'JOSEPH, overlord of the lower kingdoms,' who has '{*Come to me tenderly, put your hands upon me like a gift of fear.*}'.<sup>492</sup> The poet appears to be undertaking a journey which few have championed: 'We think of travel, a journey to be made: for we owe nothing, and we pass into the way of those who search out a new land, of explorers in a territory where defeat has left,' that is, has left other travelers broken. The poet begins to emerge from the psychodramas of the apocalyptic city when asking of

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

a different city, 'Where is peace? the regions of light flooding the body,' where the swallows fly 'over fields of grain?'— 'the kingdom I seek'.<sup>493</sup> The dueling cities, between Hell and the body of light, between a bi-sexual psychodrama and a queer form, will also relate to *Heavenly City, Earthly City* (the collection *The Years As Catches* was included in). The poem's resurrecting structure and tropisms introduce the vital foundation for Duncan's undying form.

'Toward the Shaman' works through the poet's bodily 'wounds' in order to 'pass thru' the 'loss' of 'N' (Ned Fabs) and obtain a sense of psychological community. The poet first works a heteronormative fairy tale by substituting the female role of guide with a male, 'Joseph,' initiating the journey, but the poem reveals another 'he,' who is not the guiding Joseph but one appearing as a member of the poet's 'we'. It is this 'he' that is taken to be the community's lost object, as introduced in 'Persephone'. Duncan writes, '{I had not believed so much as loved | and love turns back. it is thru N. that I have come | to this place'.<sup>494</sup> And since 'he has turned back,' it is 'Because of this wound that I return to this place'; except 'he shall know that I have passed thru'.<sup>495</sup> Duncan's melancholic tone returns to the wounds on its body, and, like 'the man who died,' the re-opening of the wounds and the separation return to a loss in the semblance of a death-drive, where 'the journey comes first, or loss before journey'.<sup>496</sup> The movement revolutionises the politics of the community through a healing of sexual conviviality: 'Let us speak of a revolution: | there is no movement apart from movement'.<sup>497</sup> In resonance with 'the man who died,' whose resurrection and ultimate parting is mainly driven by an omphalic wound — 'especially the death-wound through his belly,' wrote Lawrence — Duncan's Christ-like poet is driven by his wounds of loss, as 'I think of N,' mending his own wounds, particularly the 'navel' wound, as Duncan's 'wanderer, the man' concludes by having his omphalos healed, scarred, retraced—'the navel like the center of the world above the bone fissure' aches as he 'goes apart in his own way'.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

What gets teased out in Duncan, when accounting for his interest in Lawrence, is the utilisation of man and woman to harness a poetics of resurrection wielded in a perpetual dying. The specific 'fairy tale' label, which is held onto so tightly here, does not define the wider poetics of gender oppositions and sexual difference found throughout Duncan generally, but it stresses what is often downplayed in criticism and what is pivotal for his oeuvre and my chapter. The movement of resurrection established at *The Phoenix*, and the serial formations which Duncan morphs such a movement into, are entrenched in Lawrence's work. Its queer form, however, is definitive of Duncan, where a poet seeks to enter a psychical and social community where gendered and sexual relations are accommodated and not repressed, yet progress is tied to, and works through, the wounds and loss which are perpetually relived. Perhaps more fundamental for this chapter as well as for Duncan's radical form is the role of the body, its wounds and its healing, as that site which grounds the relation to man and woman, a relation which brings such death and resurrection. In Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* and in Duncan's earliest poetry, this undying body exists and surfaces in the form of the text.

**The Fleshly Microcosm**  
**of *Apocalypse* and *Heavenly City*, *Earthly City***

**1944-1947**

When Duncan left the east coast and returned to the Bay, the political poetics of *The Phoenix* were bridged with the bohemian formations of the Berkeley Renaissance, which quickly spawned the San Francisco Renaissance. Iconic elements of the San Francisco Renaissance include Madeline Gleason's San Francisco Poetry Guild in 1947 and the Six Gallery reading in 1955, both of which formed around a Cold War setting. The Six Gallery reading, where Ginsberg read his *Howl*, which Kerouac revisited in *The Dharma Bums*, was planned by the Korean War veteran and artist Wally Hedrick. Its



Cold War context provided a 'birthing ground' for the Beats,<sup>499</sup> and as William Everson would later recall, 'It took Korea and the second Eisenhower administration to make the country ready'.<sup>500</sup> But San Francisco's Cold War atmosphere was different from the procreative Berkeley Renaissance in 1945, which sprouted in that more immediate and sombre afterlife of World War II, and, in some cases, under different literary influences. The Berkeley Renaissance is largely represented by Duncan, Jack Spicer and Robin Blaser, who each, in one way or another, came under the wing of Kenneth Rexroth, as many of the Bay Area poets did. The extensive poetics and politics of the Berkeley Renaissance, from 1944 to 1947, were a distinct formation before its evolutions after 1948.

Criticism often returns to Duncan's matured poetry dating after 1948, but the communal groundwork of the preceding years is pivotal. Duncan's debut collection, *Heavenly City, Earthly City* (1947), tracks a communal movement from 1944-1947, yet only few poems have received critical attention, thus the serialised movement throughout the collection is largely missed. Daniel S. Burt notes that the style of *Heavenly City, Earthly City* 'would embarrass the poet later in life',<sup>501</sup> and Robert Creeley first found the collection 'rather poor',<sup>502</sup> yet Creeley eventually admired and appropriated a poetic of word repetition from 'The Venice Poem',<sup>503</sup> which is central for the preceding 'Heavenly City, Earthly City,' and it was *Heavenly City, Earthly City* that sparked Denise Levertov's admiration for Duncan.<sup>504</sup> Among its stylistic traits, the collection's communitising context and poetic would ground not only Duncan's poetry but a social movement as well.

Michael Davidson's *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (1989) introduces Rexroth's poetry in 1944 but Davidson mostly focuses on

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<sup>499</sup> Ann Douglas, 'Holy Fools: The Beat Generation and the Cold War', *Reviews in American History*, 41:3, (September, 2013), p. 532.

<sup>500</sup> David Meltzer, ed., *San Francisco Beat: Talking with the Poets* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001), p. 42.

<sup>501</sup> *The Chronology of American Literature: America's Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times*, ed. by Daniel S. Burt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), p. 475.

<sup>502</sup> Ekbert Faas, *Robert Creeley: A Biography* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2001), p. 86.

<sup>503</sup> Alice Entwistle, 'Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan: A World of Contradiction,' *Journal of American Studies*, 32:2 (August 1998), pp. 263-279 (269).

<sup>504</sup> *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, ed. by Albert Gelpi (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. viii.

Duncan and Spicer after 1947, in moving towards the later San Francisco scene; however, the early need for 'vital contact' in the Berkeley poets, to bring together 'forms of community' in 'an emerging bohemia,'<sup>505</sup> perhaps apply all the more in those germinal years. Rexroth's Anarchist Circle was organised in the early '40s, of which Duncan attended, and its growth into the Libertarian Circle had already seen the launching of the journal *Ark* by 1947. Duncan, Spicer, and Blaser began collaborating well before 1948, before forming their circle around Ernst Kantorowicz in the image of the *George Kreis*. Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian also date the Berkeley Renaissance as beginning in 1945,<sup>506</sup> as Spicer would declare his new birth-date to be 1946—the year he met Duncan. Before 1947, Spicer produced poems that would posthumously be collected as *Collected Poems: 1945-1946*, and Duncan would publish *Heavenly City, Earthly City* in '47. The formation of Duncan's collection, from '45 to '47, maps a communal history, and follows a queer body-politic of psychical and social relations wherein one's dying was a form of communal life. Much of the collection's development and ultimate titular poem have been overlooked in criticism, as well as a foundational figure for the Berkeley poetic before 1948, particularly for Duncan: D.H. Lawrence and his apocalypticism.

Davidson notes the Bay Area's neoclassicism was derivative of Eliot and Auden, its regionalism rooted in Robinson Jeffers and Frost,<sup>507</sup> but its shared elegiac form, particularly in Rexroth's circle, had stemmed from 'the British "apocalyptic"' movement (Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece, George Barker) as well as more regional writers like Jeffers and Henry Miller'.<sup>508</sup> But it is Lawrence who stirred as a cultish figure within the apocalypticisms of Britain's New Apocalypse and Rexroth's circle. Lawrence's vision of the apocalypse intended to be distinct, as he prefaced that one should find a reading of Revelations to be 'different every time we read it'.<sup>509</sup> Lawrence's apocalypticism was tied to socio-political contexts, yet did not concern itself with society's physical death, but was instead concerned with how modern society's repression of the sensual body would

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<sup>505</sup> Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1989), p. 59.

<sup>506</sup> *My Vocabulary Did This to Me: The Collected Poetry of Jack Spicer*, ed. by Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>507</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 41.

<sup>508</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 35.

<sup>509</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (New York: Viking Press, 1967), p. 5.

not allow its false sense of 'self' to die, a 'self' which desperately needed to change. In his last book, *Apocalypse* (1931), the once humble lower-class, who hated the aristocrats, 'were "it," the elect, or the "saved,"'<sup>510</sup> turning Christianity's presumed lack of ego into 'the self-glorification of the humble'.<sup>511</sup> *Apocalypse* introduces the 'self glorification of the weak' as 'the reign of the pseudo-humble. This is the spirit of society today, religious and political,' and, for Lawrence, an individual's or society's revolutionary strength is lost when glorifying the 'self'.<sup>512</sup>

Thus Lawrence's own apocalyptic vision opposes the West's appropriation of Revelations in two primary ways. *Apocalypse* advocates the body's ability to administer a sense of one's dying self. By proposing that a physical sense of self-death should be a continuing process, change for Lawrence first occurs in the body and then in society as a result. The physical contingencies of Lawrence's long-developed apocalypticism therefore defines itself around the concept of a bodily 'microcosm'. In *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, *Studies in Classic American Literature* and *Apocalypse*, a theory of a 'microcosm' emerges, for it is the body's affect which senses otherness, particularly through sexual difference and confrontation in *Fantasia*, and *Apocalypse* recognises that the sensation of otherness is what propels the self's desire for its own ends, or the self's fear of its own death; each of which re-affirm the projection of self and avoid actually working through the presence of otherness. Lawrence's microcosm, on the other hand, locates such polarities as self/Other, Man/Woman, Sun/Moon, light/dark, in order to tease out the fleshly intermediary substance in between: the sensible body. By nearly reducing cosmic and societal dynamics to the limits of the flesh, and by realising the flesh's ability to sense, push, kill, support, and resurrect forms of self, Lawrence's polarised and fleshly microcosm aims to revolutionise the 'individual' and its social relations from the ground up. The polarisation in Duncan's own *Heavenly City*, *Earthly City*, if read through its serialised form, similarly moves through a reversibility of sexual difference in a microcosm of polarised elements, in order to arrive at a queer sense of identity, in a bodily form, within the collection's final, titular poem, where the 'undying song' of Apollo's Sun will bathe the poet's body. The explicit gender reversals and their

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

deconstruction in *Heavenly City, Earthly City* follow a homosexual pathos into a consummated body of community, rendering Lawrence's polarised microcosm a queer form of undying. The latter half of this section will therefore provide a close reading of Duncan's collection.

Duncan returned to the Bay from *The Phoenix*, where a communal-anarchism and apocalyptic poetic of re-birth were founded upon Lawrence's philosophy. Duncan transplanted such a poetic back to Berkeley, where Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin and Duncan, each a cornerstone of *The Phoenix*, would publish with Ben Porter in Berkeley.<sup>513</sup> Upon relocating to the Bay, Duncan commuted from his new colony at Treesbank farm to join The Anarchist Circle with Rexroth, who had visited Duncan at Treesbank and whom Duncan described as a 'Laurentian' who had also 'sent some things to The Phoenix'.<sup>514</sup> Soon they were joined by William Everson, who, Rexroth said, 'belongs in the tradition of D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>515</sup> Together they map a Lawrentian wave arriving in Berkeley at the dawn of a renaissance.

While Rexroth and Everson did not share the gay poetics of Duncan, Spicer and Blaser, Duncan later told Rexroth that the Bay had come to share a 'unifying principle in the elegiac tone',<sup>516</sup> and it is apparent that the Rexroth circle stressed an apocalypticism, one Duncan recalled as belonging to Lawrence:

Rexroth's theory of the poem was that it should in our time be apocalyptic. I find I still, myself, when I'm thinking of the word, am apocalyptic, and so was Ginsberg in his way, and this made for a very common ground. The thing about Rexroth is that he kept alive the tradition, very important to him, was the role that Yeats had or Lawrence had in keeping vital the tradition had in this world.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Lewis Ellingham and Kevin Killian, *Poet Be Like God* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>514</sup> 'On Kenneth Rexroth (with Linda Hamalian), *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews with Robert Duncan, 1960-1985*, ed. by Christopher Wagstaff (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2012), p. 268.

<sup>515</sup> Lee Bartlett, *William Everson: The Life of Brother Antoninus* (New York: New Directions, 1988), p. 105.

<sup>516</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 33.

<sup>517</sup> 'Duncan Interview w/ Nathaniel Tarn,' 23 March, 1969, with the BBC Radio 3.

The tradition of the apocalypse runs throughout Lawrence, who saw that 'The Apocalypse has been running for nearly two thousand years: the hidden side of Christianity: and its work it nearly done. For the Apocalypse does not worship power'.<sup>518</sup> Duncan and Rexroth forged an apocalypticism that was particularly Lawrentian, one that was not supernatural but sexual, sensual, and political. Rexroth also shared what Duncan later listed as his forefathers: 'I had three: Pound, Williams, and D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>519</sup> Though Pound resurfaces more after 1948, Duncan saw Williams and Lawrence taking the initial lead:

Our work [...] came, in fact, more from Williams than Pound, and Williams in his work affirms both Lawrence and Pound. Williams clearly knew the difference between himself and Lawrence. Kenneth Rexroth very early said that you can't just have a Poundian line, you must have a Lawrentian one.<sup>520</sup>

Duncan would stipulate that though Pound and Lawrence both found 'contemporary civilization' to be 'violently disturbing,' Lawrence was 'concerned with psychological depths where Pound was concerned with economic ideas,'<sup>521</sup> a distinction informing Duncan's own predominantly psychical and mythical poetry in Berkeley. Found within the body itself, Lawrence's apocalyptic tool was not only always already at hand for Duncan and Rexroth's circle, but it rendered Lawrence all the more applicable, or at least more human. Richard Candida-Smith mentions in *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (1995) that in Rexroth's eyes Lawrence 'had not wished to play the devil, as Rimbaud and Artaud,' nor 'was he aspirant to heaven, like Claudel,' rather, 'Lawrence the poet was simply one human being among others, a craftsman whose work

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<sup>518</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 27.

<sup>519</sup> Robert Duncan, 'Early Poetic Community (with Robert Duncan)'. *The American Poetry Review*, 3:3 (May/June 1974), pp. 54-58 (54).

<sup>520</sup> Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg, Robert Duncan, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan,' *Chicago Review*, 44:1 (1999), pp. 103-104.

<sup>521</sup> 'To Rexroth/Nation,' SUNY, Buffalo, Poetry Collection. Duncan wrote a letter to *The Nation* to correct the 'misinformation' Rexroth had written about Duncan's *The Opening of the Field* (1960), thereby clarifying much of Duncan's experience at The Phoenix and reception of Lawrence.

was to explore the wisdom to be gained from personal experience'.<sup>522</sup> Rexroth considered Lawrence as an intimately relatable, disillusioned poet and applied him as a communal adhesive. On the dustjacket of Everson's *The Residual Years* (1948), Rexroth wrote: 'Lawrence, a poet unfashionable recently, but now returning to influence,'<sup>523</sup> and in Rexroth's own 1947 Introduction to *D.H. Lawrence: Selected Poems*, Rexroth writes, 'Poetry is vision, the pure act of sensual communion and contemplation'.<sup>524</sup>

Rexroth's Lawrentian poetic remains a vital context for Duncan's Berkeley poetic. Duncan had admired Rexroth's publications in the *Partisan Review* and *View* while in New York, and anticipated meeting Rexroth when returning to the Bay in '42.<sup>525</sup> At Hamilton and Mary Tyler's Pond Farm, relocated as Treesbank, Rexroth visited Duncan and gained what Duncan called 'rabid Rexroth devotees'. Duncan soon began commuting to Berkeley to form 'The Anarchist Circle' with Rexroth,<sup>526</sup> and for Duncan's first meeting, 'Rexroth talked on Lawrence'.<sup>527</sup> At that time, 'many of the poets came together under the agency of Kenneth Rexroth,' who was 'a political and aesthetic adviser'.<sup>528</sup> Yet Rexroth's poetic had relied on woman for a glimmering hope at the tail-end of destruction, while Duncan's gender performances sustain a queer, transformative apocalypticism. Rexroth's signature poem of 1944, 'The Phoenix and the Tortoise,' represents the decay of civilisation and his heteronormative consolation, as the poet ultimately looks to his wife. In the throes of World War II, the poem begins by depicting America as the 'Foolish city asleep under its guns; | Its rodent ambitions washing out | In sewage and unwholesome dreams,' dreams spun by a War Economy: 'War is the health of the State? Indeed! | War is the State'.<sup>529</sup> Rexroth wears a Blakean and Lawrentian anarchism on his sleeve when confronting 'John of Patmos, | The philosopher of history,' where the image of 'Lawrence dying of his body' appears under the 'Blue gentians

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<sup>522</sup> Richard Candida-Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (London: University of California Press, 1995), p. 47.

<sup>523</sup> William Everson: *The Life of Brother Antoninus*, p. 105.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 84.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid, p. 2010.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 37.

<sup>529</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, *The Collected Longer Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1994), p. 73.

burning in the dark mind; | The conflict of events and change'.<sup>530</sup> Rexroth's image of Lawrence 'dying of his body' and 'Blue gentians' stem from Lawrence's *Last Poems* (i.e. 'death poems'), where 'Bavarian Gentians' rise after the poem 'Body' and before 'The Ship of Death,' concluding with 'Phoenix'. 'Bavarian Gentians' ends with the blue light Rexroth needs in his 'dark mind,' as Lawrence writes:

lead me then, lead me the way.

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch!

Let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of a flower

down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness

down the way Persephone goes, just now, in first-frosted September<sup>531</sup>

Lawrence's torch follows Persephone through Hell in a hope of restoring life, much like Lawrence's honeymoon poems, which Rexroth also praised. Lawrence's sexual mysticism joins what Davidson calls Rexroth's 'hope for a phoenix-like *aufhebung* from the ashes of war,' a hope that also lies in the 'nakedness' of Rexroth's wife, continues Davidson, along with 'the play of sunlight on her hair'.<sup>532</sup> But Davidson concludes that the poet's position here is that of an observer, looking down at the world or his wife, which reflects Rexroth's subservience to 'a rhetoric of loss and self-consciousness that severely limits any powers of participation'.<sup>533</sup> Rexroth's closing depiction in the poem of the literate world as an 'insect,' 'Dispassionate, efficient, formic,' also refers to Lawrence's 'Hymns in a Man's Life,' where intellectuals suffer from 'boredom' while their lack of 'wonder' and experience of 'nothing' grow like cancer, transforming mankind into a post-apocalyptic 'insect'.<sup>534</sup> The death of Rexroth's apocalypse looks to Lawrence's body while idealising the desperation of a resolve constructed according to gender.

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 697.

<sup>532</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 47.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid.

<sup>534</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 7.

Though Everson was also tuned into Lawrence's (hetero)sexual naturalism at that time,<sup>535</sup> Duncan would consider Rexroth's idealised heterosexuality as resulting in both a self-denial and a neglect of Lawrence. Decades later Rexroth had negatively critiqued Lawrence, as in 'D.H. Lawrence: The Other Face of the Coin' (1964), claiming Lawrence's ill-health and ill-company had corroded his polemical 'religion which could not, by very definition, outlive the generation which gave birth to it'.<sup>536</sup> But Duncan blamed Rexroth's late flip-flop on self-ignorance, arguing in '76: 'Rexroth turned against Lawrence, against Pound, and against Robinson Jeffers: Lawrence didn't have any children, so he's an incomplete man. Rexroth wanted to emerge as the ideal man. At that point he—Rexroth—was doing something I could see: "he's denying his sources," I said, "and is thereby denying the self"'.<sup>537</sup> Even so, Rexroth's late essay acknowledges Lawrence's reception in the young minds of the 'Sexual Revolution.'

Rexroth's Lawrentian apocalypticism during the Berkeley Renaissance is perhaps best represented by his 1947 Introduction for *D.H. Lawrence: Selected Poems*, entitled, 'Poetry, Regeneration, and D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>538</sup> The Introduction is 'as much a manifesto for a new poetry as an explanatory preface,' observes Lee Bartlett, as Rexroth took 'such occasions to throw down the gauntlet to the Literary Establishment'.<sup>539</sup> After proposing Lawrence's poetry with Frieda in *Look! We Have Come Through!* as 'the greatest imagist poems ever written,' Rexroth makes the sexual journey a political one. Following Lawrence's working-class background, Rexroth sees a Christ-like ascension from the coal-mines of his father, 'traveling up the dark hot tube, seeking immortality'.<sup>540</sup> The revolution of Lawrence's poetry falls under his sense of dying, as Rexroth's essay progresses by reading 'The Ship of Death' as 'a small book of mediations,' finding it 'a contemporary Holy Dying,' while contemporary society represses its dying instead of

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<sup>535</sup> William Everson: *The Life of Brother Antoninus*, p. 38.

<sup>536</sup> A review of *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence* and *The Painting of D.H. Lawrence*, published in *The Nation* (23 November 1964), reprinted in *With Eye and Ear* (Herder & Herder, 1970).

<sup>537</sup> Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg, Robert Duncan, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan,' *Chicago Review*, 44:1 (1999), p. 104.

<sup>538</sup> Kenneth Rexroth, 'Poetry, Regeneration, and D.H. Lawrence,' *Lawrence's Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1947), pp. 1-23.

<sup>539</sup> William Everson: *The Life of Brother Antoninus*, p. 97.

<sup>540</sup> 'Poetry, Regeneration, and D.H. Lawrence'.



living it. Rexroth writes: 'This is not an age in which a "good death" is a desired end of life,' since Americans want 'Anything but the facts of life,' because 'Modern man is terribly afraid of sex, of pain, of evil, of death,' and 'our whole civilization is a conspiracy to pretend that it isn't going to happen. [...] Human alienation, Marx called it'.<sup>541</sup> Lawrence does not just allow Rexroth to think death – to fear, desire or project death, but to consciously experience dying in the present, a sensual communion in the movement of dying. Rexroth concludes, 'In a world where death had become a nasty, pervasive secret like defecation or masturbation, Lawrence reinstated it in all its grandeur – the oldest and most powerful of the gods. "The Ship of Death" poems have an exaltation, a nobility, a steadiness, an insouciance, which is not only not of this time but is rare in any time'.<sup>542</sup> Rexroth's romanticisation of Lawrence's direct experience of death is purposed for political contexts, yet Rexroth's own anarchistic poetic seems to be plateauing rather than grasping a fleshly (not to mention queer) movement through otherness and gender that Duncan's poetic embodied.

For Duncan, as for Lawrence, dying was not merely an eternal-recurrence but the continuance of bodily change. The 'Holy Dying' that Rexroth praised in Lawrence's 'The Ship of Death' is a ship of continual transformation rather than of climax or conclusion. Duncan had also written that 'both The Ship of Death and the Pisan Cantos move in inspired voice,'<sup>543</sup> for an elegiac journey resides in both. Later acknowledging his general relationship to 'The Ship of Death,' Duncan stated:

I only know that I'm constantly reading and rereading him and there are not that many poets that I read and reread. Ever time I read 'The Ship of Death,' it's not that it morally instructs me. In the first place it presents to me very strongly Lawrence's life style. Now that's not my life style. Certain parts of it are, other parts of it aren't. But what's essential in it is that 'The Ship of Death' is absolutely going on in me like a poem of my own would be. And I'm struck by lots of poets whose own poems are not

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg, Robert Duncan, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan,' *Chicago Review*, 44:1 (1999), p. 104.

going on in them that way. I'd want to know how many of your own poems are going on in you as admitted and constantly there, reconsulted and informing the entire concept of the poetic level. Lawrence enters just as my own word does here.<sup>544</sup>

Faas's biography highlights Duncan's attachment to 'Pound's "river of crystal light," Yeats's "sea of dew" or Lawrence's "Ship of Death," three images that 'made [Duncan] stop dead' when thinking of childhood, as each 'related to the notion of a mythic journey across the sea'.<sup>545</sup> 'The Ship of Death' harbors the apocalyptic motif of Duncan's early phoenix-like poetry and conveys a final letting-go within the darkness of oblivion, where everything coheres in incoherence, like Pound's last Canto 'CXVI' (1969). But the poem's repetitive language and imagery opens a space that 'lies between the old self and the new,' and, as David Ellis simply concludes, 'Lawrence's oblivion does not mark the end of "The Ship of Death"'.<sup>546</sup> The poem's non-teleological liminality maintains a change of identity, or entity, through a material subsistence:

There is no port, there is nowhere to go  
only the deepening black darkening still  
blackier upon the soundless, ungurgling flood  
darkness at one with darkness, up and down  
and sideways utterly dark, so there is no direction any more.  
And the little ship is there; yet she is gone.  
She is not seen, for there is nothing to see her by.  
She is gone! gone! and yet  
somewhere she is there.  
Nowhere! <sup>547</sup>

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<sup>544</sup> Ekbert Faas, 'An Interview with Robert Duncan,' *boundary 2*, 8:2 (Winter 1980), pp. 1-19 (5).

<sup>545</sup> *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 26.

<sup>546</sup> David Ellis, *Death & the Author: How D.H. Lawrence Died, and Was Remembered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 72.

<sup>547</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 719.

A sense of going nowhere exists, but such non-linearity exists in transition. 'The Ship of Death' is serialised into ten sections but was drafted to be longer, now parceled into four additional poems: 'Difficult Death,' 'All Souls' Day,' 'The Houseless Dead' and 'Beware the Unhappy Dead'.<sup>548</sup> The poem's serialisation is contextualised by poems such as 'Bodiless God,' 'The Body of God,' 'The Rainbow' (for 'Even the rainbow has a body') and 'The Hands of God'. However, since death itself is not defined as bodily, since the bodily ship floats on, the serialisation is rather a slow killing of the egoic self through an undying body. The collection's alternating rants against modern industry and finance conclude in 'What Then Is Evil,' where 'there alone lies the pivot of pure evil | only in the soul of man, when it pivots upon the ego'.<sup>549</sup> 'The Ship of Death' is a bodily vessel that destroys 'the old self' in a soulful transformation characteristic of Lawrence's *Apocalypse*.

Critics such as Peter Fjågesund, Frank Kermode, L.D. Clark and Sarah Urang have argued that 'the entire framework of Lawrence's thought relies on an apocalyptic interpretation of reality',<sup>550</sup> and *Apocalypse* is that last work in Lawrence's evolving apocalypticism. *Apocalypse* was written in 1929, the year *The Man Who Died* was completed, yet it grows from *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, and thus its body-politic deeply intertwines with the gendered conflicts of *Fantasia*'s psychical life. *Apocalypse* was posthumously published in '31 but formally began in '22 and '23 as a response to both Frederick Carter's manuscript, *The Dragon of the Apocalypse*, and Carter's request for Lawrence to write its Introduction. Carter's correspondence finds Lawrence living in Taos, New Mexico, between *Fantasia* (1921) and *Fantasia*'s well-known applications throughout *Studies* (1923). Mara Kalnins introduces *Apocalypse* as running through the early *Fantasia*, which is clarified when Lawrence told Carter in '23 that his particular apocalypticism is confined to the intermediary site of the body, what he calls the 'microcosm': 'Myself I am more interested in the microcosm than in the macrocosm, and in the gates to the psyche rather than the astrological houses'.<sup>551</sup> Corporeality is the gate

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<sup>548</sup> Keith Sagar, *D.H. Lawrence: Poet* (Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), p. 136.

<sup>549</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 712.

<sup>550</sup> Peter Fjågesund, *The Apocalyptic World of D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Norwegian University Press, 1991), p. 1. Frank Kermode's 'Foreword' to Fjågesund; L.D. Clark's 'The Apocalypse of Lorenzo'; Sarah Urang's *Kindled in the Flame*.

<sup>551</sup> *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, ed. by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3.

to the psyche in *Fantasia* and *Apocalypse*, as Lawrence wrote in the subsequent letter, 'It's a revelation of Initiation experience, and the clue is in the microcosm, in the human body itself [and] the Man in the Zodiac has his clue in the man of flesh and blood'.<sup>552</sup> In early drafts of *Studies*, published as *The Symbolic Meaning*, Lawrence uses the somatic tropes of *Fantasia* to outline a cultural body seeded in apocalyptic vision: 'It is certain that St. John gives us in the Apocalypse a cypher-account of the process of the conquest of the lower or sensual dynamic centres by the upper or spiritual dynamic consciousness, a conquest affected centre by centre, towards a culmination in the actual experience of spiritual infinitude'.<sup>553</sup> Here Lawrence moves from *Fantasia*, through *Studies*, and into a creative vision of a spiritual world that is confined to the consciousness of the flesh and its internalised dynamics, a microcosm that perceives and governs a psychical and social community.

From *Fantasia* to *The Symbolic Meaning*, the microcosm is a corporeal realm where *being* is a form of osmosis and *becoming* is symbiotic, wherein the psychical and sensual are linked point by point; and yet the microcosm is also the site of a universe created within the splitting of sexual difference. In *Fantasia*, the conflicts between wife and husband are meant to produce physical friction, to shake self-consciousness: 'They must fight their way out of their self-consciousness: there is nothing else. Or rather, each must fight the other out of self-consciousness,' for 'If a woman's husband gets on her nerves, she should fly at him. If she thinks him too sweet and swarmy with other people, she should let him have it to his nose, straight out'.<sup>554</sup> The domestic antagonisms between genders in *Fantasia* are meant to produce a developmental psychology, rearing a tertiary subject (e.g. the child, the reader). *Fantasia*'s focus upon the material body works to perpetually deconstruct its binaries, in order to introduce the 'third-term,' a material *being*, created out of dualities. Such is conveyed by the light/dark or Sun/Moon polarities within the late chapter 'Cosmological': 'Sun and moon are dynamically polarised to our actual tissue, they affect this tissue all the time,' and 'light and dark are a question both of the third body, the intervening body, what we will call, by stretching a point, the individual'—

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid, p. 4. Lawrence's letter to Carter, 18 June 1923.

<sup>553</sup> Ibid, p. 6. 'Cooper's Anglo-American Novels' in *The Symbolic Meaning*, p. 75.

<sup>554</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, p. 197.

'the third, the intermediate, the substantial'.<sup>555</sup> Lawrence concludes by breaking down an individual's substance:

These four adjectives, cosmic, universal, material, and infinite are almost interchangeable, and apply, as we see, to that realm of the non-individual existence which we call the realm of the substantial death. It is the universe which has resulted from the death of individuals. And to this universe alone belongs the quality of infinity: to the universe of death. Living individuals have no infinity save in this relation to the total death-substance and death-being, the summed-up cosmos.<sup>556</sup>

In *Fantasia*, as in 'The Ship of Death,' the body is comprised of a material which is infinite and universal, remaining contingent to cosmic forces that facilitate the 'death of individuals' or the concept of self. The ontology underlining *Fantasia* is not so much a vitalism as a form of un-dying, the body's sense of its 'death-being,' which includes a community of otherness within the flesh. *Fantasia*'s microcosm is 'a dynamic psychic activity,' which incorporates the 'dynamic polarity between the individual himself and other individuals concerned in his living: or between him and his immediate surroundings, human, physical, geographical'.<sup>557</sup>

In the subsequent essays of *The Symbolic Meaning*, particularly in 'The Two Principles,' Lawrence elaborates upon the atomic creation of the microcosm, from stars or the Sun, in order to apply its parts to the psychical life of the body. 'Two Principles' was initially drafted for the essays on Melville and Dana in *Studies*, and expresses the 'impersonal' yet 'elemental' relation between the 'cosmic element' of sea and sky to that of the 'human psyche'.<sup>558</sup> Although the duality of 'Two Principles' may imply the individual and its other, the essay reiterates the material third-space of cosmic creation. Like the 'Holy Ghost' in *Fantasia*, here the 'Spirit of God' is a 'creative being' that divides 'the first

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>558</sup> D.H. Lawrence, 'The Two Principles,' *The Symbolic Meaning* (New York: Viking Press, 1964), p. 175.

Heaven and the first Earth, terms of the inexplicable primordial duality,<sup>559</sup> yet God's spirit is also a material—a 'homogenous rare *living* plasm'.<sup>560</sup> Appealing to Genesis, Lawrence returns to the origin and the division of Light and Dark, which manifests into the Sun's Fire and Water: Hydrogen and Oxygen. For Lawrence, 'hydrogen and oxygen are the first naked products of the two parent-elements, water and fire,' the 'proper conditions of chemical procreation'.<sup>561</sup> Lawrence's alchemism polarises the bodily microcosm of Heaven and Earth, a move *Heavenly City, Earthly City* will rehearse. 'Two Principles' tracks the birth of paganistic and psychoanalytic symbolisation through the engendering of elemental polarities, describing the cosmic waters (oxygen) as being pulled towards the fire of the sun (hydrogen) and pushed away from it, reflecting the living substance in between. So too will *Apocalypse* increasingly concern itself with the flesh that exists between sexual difference, the polarisation of sun-moon, self-other, or individual-community. After 1923, however, Lawrence's apocalypticism drops gender oppositioning as a key example of polarization and moves towards a more universal structure of *difference*. Fjågesund notes that 'the sexual act' of 'man and woman,' which was a 'source of renewal' in *Fantasia*, fades in the microcosm of *Apocalypse*.<sup>562</sup>

*Apocalypse* primarily critiques teleological illusions of self. Lawrence relates the self's desire and fear of the Other as the motive behind Western modernity, its industrialisation, capitalism and war, but mostly behind its manufacturing of individuals. Thus Lawrence's own apocalypticism envisions a body that can resist projecting an imagined future death of the Self – to resist prophecy itself – by relying on the present sensation of death only. *Apocalypse* argues that it was John of Patmos who, without precedent, established a teleology promising revolution while definitively undermining it. The outcome of Revelations was that the masses did invest in a revolution against the feared 'aristocrats,' writes Lawrence, but this produced communities which feared strong individuals, and thus individuals who feared other individuals, and therefore weak communities as well. Just as Lawrence begins *Apocalypse* by stating that a pedantic teaching of the Bible is that which ruins any creative interest, where 'The process defeats

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>562</sup> *The Apocalyptic World of D.H. Lawrence*, pp. 86-87.

its own ends,'<sup>563</sup> so too does *Apocalypse's* main premise argue that the teleologies produced by an individual's fear for itself is exactly what undermines the collective formation of an individual: 'So today. Society consists of a mass of weak individuals trying to protect themselves, out of fear, from every possible imaginary evil, and, of course, by their very fear, bringing the evil into being'.<sup>564</sup> Such body-politics seems to capture Rexroth's anarchistic readings of Lawrence, in that the self of modernity does not know how to die, out of fear, and therefore does not know how to live. In *Apocalypse*, Lawrence's sense of dying and living are so interwoven that the two are nearly indistinguishable movements, undermining a politics of desire or fear. Against imagining that a crisis will bring revolution, Lawrence writes, 'We torture ourselves getting somewhere, and when we get there it is nowhere, for there is nowhere to get to'.<sup>565</sup> Bearing resemblances with 'The Ship of Death' and the 'death-substance' of *Fantasia*, the microcosmic body of *Apocalypse* cannot go anywhere, which is why and where transformation occurs.

Criticism has often stressed Lawrence's fictional right-wing leaders in discussing his politics, yet *Apocalypse*, mirroring the narrators in those fictions, progresses by locating the space between the not-yet strong individual who must be created out of a communal body and a community that must be created out of individuals. Simon Casey's study of Lawrence's anarchism argued that Lawrence's anarchistic principles cannot be reduced to either 'fulfilled individuality' or 'real community,' nor an irreconcilability between the two, but rather a generative intimacy in conflicting differences.<sup>566</sup> Indeed, Mara Kalnins has noted that *Fantasia* and *Apocalypse* share the Heraclitean thesis that "'strife" or conflict is the power which causes all things to rise into being,'<sup>567</sup> that is, a death-being. David Marriott's 'No Second Chances' in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (2011) is informative here, concerning Lawrence's sense of individualism in otherness. Marriott examines 'the relation between anticipation and waiting, on the one hand, and

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<sup>563</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 4.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>566</sup> Simon Casey, *Naked Liberty and the World of Desire: Elements of Anarchism in the Work of D.H. Lawrence* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>567</sup> *Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, p. 13.

between intimacy and desire, on the other,<sup>568</sup> and does so by re-reading Adam Phillips and Leo Bersani's *Intimacies* (2008), where 'narcissism' is no longer the 'saboteur' of intimacy, but rather intimacy allows the ego to experience itself in death (like 'unsafe sex'), for 'Narcissism is deathly. It is death'.<sup>569</sup> By situating life as the presence of death, narcissism can commit itself to the other for its own undying. Intimacy, as Marriott finds it in Bersani, occurs in the torsion between feeling death from desired sexuality (the ego resisting sexual desire in the other, as Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?') and working through that feeling narcissistically: 'the conditions of possibility of narcissism itself'.<sup>570</sup> Through Bersani, Marriott offers inroads by stating, 'It may be that we have become so accustomed to thinking that narcissism blinds us to the social that we overlooked how socio-symbolic logic blinds us to the politics of narcissism,' and Phillips confirms, 'our narcissism is not narcissistic enough'.<sup>571</sup> Narcissistic intimacy, that is, a dying life, shall operate on the condition of a 'self-shattering' in 'impersonality'.<sup>572</sup> Lawrence seems to comparably argue that our apocalypticism is not apocalyptic enough.

The death of self-consciousness, for Lawrence, lies in the sexualised and quite paganistic impersonality of the (non)individual, which exists in an affected flesh from the other. For while the elite fear and martyrdom of Western apocalypticism 'chose suicide, with subsequent self-glorification,' Lawrence's apocalyptic employs a narcissistic tone in requiring the death of the self: 'We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos'.<sup>573</sup> For *Apocalypse*, ideal individualism falsely fears death in its relation to otherness, and this is what keeps strong individuals from being created out of community: 'The religions of renunciation, meditation, and self-knowledge are for individuals alone. In another great part of him, he is collective'.<sup>574</sup> Lawrence portrays a conflict between a toxic self and a socialism that absorbs resistant intersubjectivity, and summarises the current impasse in modern democracy: 'You love your neighbor. Immediately you run the risk of being absorbed by

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<sup>568</sup> David Marriott, 'No Second Chances' in E.L. McCallum and Tuhkanen, ed., *Queer Times, Queer Becomings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), p. 102.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid, p. 114.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>573</sup> *Apocalypse*, pp. 198, 200

<sup>574</sup> Ibid, p. 32.



him: you must draw back, you must hold your own. The love becomes resistance. [But] In the end, it is all resistance and no love: which is the history of democracy'.<sup>575</sup> Lawrence continually stipulates that one's *initial resistances* tend to be reactionary, either solidifying an absolute individualism based upon one's fear of an other, or completing an absorption of the other into the self under the guise of love: both of which Lawrence casts as immobilising teleologies that cause harm rather than a communal un-dying or revolution.

Working towards its conclusion, *Apocalypse* begins to advocate the role of the sensual microcosm, which does not recoil from a feared death of the self, but instead works through that very sensation in the present. By attending to bodily affect, a conflicted resistance or hyper-reflectivity may invest in a sensual dying for the sake of life. Lawrence works towards such by reiterating the aporia of American democracy and capitalism:

The Apocalypse shows us what we are resisting unnaturally. We are unnaturally resisting our connection with the cosmos, with the world, with mankind, with the nation, with the family [and yet] We cannot bear connection. That is our malady. We must break away, and be isolate. We call that being free, being individual. Beyond a certain point [however] which we have reached, it is suicide.<sup>576</sup>

Rexroth analogised Lawrence's critique of the self's fear of dying with Marx's critique of self-alienation, and *Apocalypse* accordingly concludes that one's desire for inorganic connections, like self-identification with 'money,' is a structure that should be replaced by organic connections, beginning with the most immediate – the touch of the sun upon our skin:

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<sup>575</sup> Ibid, p. 197.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid, p. 198.

There is nothing of me that is alone and absolute except my mind, and we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters.

So that my individualism is really an illusion. I am part of the great whole, and I can never escape. But I can deny my connections, break them, and become a fragment. Then I am wretched.

What we want is to destroy our false, inorganic connections, especially those related to money, and re-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth, with mankind and nation and family. Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen.<sup>577</sup>

Lawrence's inclusion of the 'nation,' however, may seem slightly out of place, as the paganism throughout *Apocalypse* clearly develops one's physical connections to the cosmos and the human, but here 'my spirit is part of the nation'.<sup>578</sup> Lawrence seems adamant to periodically link his bodily microcosm to national politics, to incite change, especially by targeting modern democracy and capitalism. But his bold inclusion of 'nation' seems only weakened by a lacking sense of nationality, and thus I find the 'nation' representative of *Apocalypse*'s own reaching for a future politic that must start with the sun upon the flesh. As Lawrence spent his final days resting and working on *Apocalypse* in the sun at The Villa Beau Soleil in Bandol, while his body gave way to tuberculosis, his sense of community began each day with writing by the window in the 'sun'. And, as he told Carter in '23, an apocalyptic revolution was but a 'subtle thing,' 'the relation between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Get that relation [...] and you've got a straight clue to *Apocalypse*'.

The polarised forces between the dark moon, eternal sun, and a bodily earth are also vital dynamics for the 'undying song' of *Heavenly City, Earthly City*. Duncan's fellow poet, Jack Spicer, was interested in John Donne's concept of a corporeal 'microcosm' during his graduate studies in the '50s, where, Spicer writes, 'the whole interior of the earth is filled with channels just as the body of man is filled with blood

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

vessels,<sup>579</sup> but Duncan's microcosm, on the other hand, like Lawrence's, teases out the interconnectivity of flesh by continually feeling the polarised forces working upon it, psychically, cosmically, and sexually. *Heavenly City, Earthly City* first gains its apocalyptic movement through the painful sense of a lost lover, and undergoes various gender oppositions in order to collect all the fragments of such a crucifying passion. The journey will introduce the underpinning relations of Duncan's queer microcosm.

At the time of composition, Duncan had married Majorie McKee in '43 and had a homosexual lover, Leslie, in '45, yet he was also with the woman Friedl, followed by William Humphrey, Dick at Pond Farm, Werner Vortrieda, and the Berkeley student Lester Hawkins,<sup>580</sup> the last two of which Lisa Jarnot finds particularly influential for *Heavenly City, Earthly City*. It is precisely this context which Duncan points to when elaborating upon the psychodramas of his bi-sexual 'fairy tale,' discussed above. In this transitory phase of *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, not only does Duncan revel in a Lawrentian apocalypticism and privilege Lawrence's bi-sexual poetics, but in the 'fairy tale' interview Duncan also relates to Lawrence's microcosmic sense when noting that, for Lawrence, sexuality works upon a flesh that is also connected to the cosmos: 'sexuality, as Freud began to propose, involves your entire skin surface as a sexual organ. There are then no boundaries to sexuality; and in our own world of writing and poetry Lawrence realised that sexuality determined your relationship with the universe'.<sup>581</sup>

Besides invoking Lawrence, the collection introduces a notoriously wide field of literary derivations and declamations.<sup>582</sup> Jarnot lists the literary influences Duncan sent to his adopted-mother regarding the collection: 'Herbert's *The Temple*, Wyatt and Surrey, Rilke and Sitwell';<sup>583</sup> however, Jarnot omits Duncan's additional listing in the '47 publication and '71 republication, which 'owe[s] much in the development of my poetic'

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<sup>579</sup> Daniel Katz, *The Poetry of Jack Spicer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 23.

<sup>580</sup> Williard Fox, *Robert Creeley, Edward Dorn, and Robert Duncan: A Reference Guide* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1988), p. 350. See also, *Young Robert Duncan: Portrait of the Poet As Homosexual in Society*, p. 207, and *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*, p. 103.

<sup>581</sup> Robert Peters, Paul Trachtenberg and Robert Duncan, 'A Conversation with Robert Duncan,' *Chicago Review*, 44:1 (1998), pp. 92-116 (111).

<sup>582</sup> *The Chronology of American Literature: America's Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times*, p. 475. Daniel S. Burt notes that the collection was generally considered to be 'derivative and declamatory'.

<sup>583</sup> *Robert Duncan, The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*, p. 103.

to 'such moderns as Wallace Stevens, D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>584</sup> The overly derivative collection seems to appropriate the orchestral movements of Sitwell's *Façade*, along with *Paterson's* 'man is indeed a city,' published the year before *Heavenly City, Earthly City*. But even Duncan's readings of Williams could not be separated from Lawrence, as Duncan explained when recalling the poetics of *The New American Poetry* and the Black Mountain School: 'what we all shared was that we were followers of Williams Carlos Williams, who read him in the light of D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>585</sup> Such a lens was neglected by Cid Corman's editing of Duncan and Olson, for 'Corman's [view] was a view of Williams that would not understand how important the D.H. Lawrence/Williams combination is, and if there was anything in which Creeley and Denise Levertov and Olson and I all concurred it was in this conjunction of Williams and Lawrence',<sup>586</sup> but 'What related us was [...] the late poetry of William Carlos Williams and that it had a very strong allegiance to the poetics and vitalism of D.H. Lawrence'.<sup>587</sup> It seems that in addition to Lawrence's apocalyptic tradition in *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, which Duncan introduced above as fundamental to him and Rexroth, Lawrence's vitalism was still operating in Duncan's cities, appropriating *Paterson's* 'man is indeed a city' and its 'beautiful thing' within the polarised flesh of a sexual microcosm.

A close reading of *Heavenly City, Earthly City* can introduce a serialised movement that develops throughout the collection, since the collection's seriality has not yet been acknowledged in criticism. By accounting for each poem, and how it transforms from those preceding, a bifurcated body can be constructed in the likes of Lawrence's

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<sup>584</sup> Muriel Rukeyser, 'Myth and Torment: Heavenly City, Earthly City by Robert Duncan'. *Poetry*, 72:1 (April 1948), pp. 48-51. See also Robert Bertholf, Robert Duncan, A Descriptive Bibliography (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1986).

<sup>585</sup> *A Poet's Mind: Collected Interviews With Robert Duncan, 1960-1985*, p. 257. 'RD: [...] Olson discovered, what really lined Olson up as his true contemporary to himself was [Robert] Creeley. And they were so different in temperament, and the impact of their poetry was very telling. Creeley has never had the disposition of a leader, but there's much to be learned about Creeley's verse. I had a hard time with his poetry at first because I'm rhetorical and he wasn't. I had to uncover his rhetoric in order to get to his verse. I had never read anything, not since Lawrence or Mary Butts had I read anybody writing a story that was in the order of *The Gold Diggers*. So it was rich; it wasn't only Charles Olson. Then this small group of writers, what we all shared was that we were followers of Williams Carlos Williams, who read him in the light of D.H. Lawrence. Charles and I could have been called post-Poundians, but it isn't very fruitful in relation to Creeley or Denise Levertov, who was another one.'

<sup>586</sup> Ibid, p. 413.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

apocalyptic microcosm—a cosmically and psychically polarised flesh that facilitates a perpetually dying self-identity. The collection's intimidating and disorienting array of tropes will make any reading of the collection quite short-sighted, but three primary figures can be followed which can navigate a study of an undying fleshly microcosm: that of Christ, Prometheus, and Icarus. Each figure is dying to become immortal, caught between darkness and light (Apollo's Sun), and suffers in the flesh, but, in the collection, each is also a figuration depicting the loss between two lovers, an affect of torn sorrow that acts as a generative catalyst for the poetics therein. The polarised affects of the psychical and cosmic forces ultimately morph into one flesh, a queer and undying identity that takes form at the collection's close.

*Heavenly City, Earthly City* opens with a 'Christ-crossed' (criss-crossed) body torn and split in its yearning for a beloved, while Apollo's lyre calls the poet towards the city of Apollo's Sun. The collection begins with 'Treesbank Poems' (1946) wherein Duncan orchestrates the musical influences of Stravinsky and Sitwell in welcoming Apollo's lyre: 'The music echoes in that sacred grove,' where the poet is hangs upon his cross, where his body is between life and death as between his solitude and otherness: 'Christ-crossd upon the body of my world. | Shall I alone make my way to my grave'.<sup>588</sup> The impetus of 'Treesbank Poems' is the body's restless motion towards the healing touch of the city of light, as Duncan continues: 'The world shall make my way to that place [...] My life may come to rest in me | where I shall restless in the future be'.<sup>589</sup> This is a vitalistic note of an awaiting 'life,' perhaps one of 'rest,' and yet, paradoxically, such a life is 'where I shall restless in the future be,' signifying a body that somehow longs for a state which the body physically resists.

What awaits and torments the poet is introduced in the following poem, 'An Apollonian Elegy,' which Robert Bertholf describes as 'the most important of the Treesbank poems'.<sup>590</sup> The poem underlines the deep myth of 'dark/light' that physically guides the poet's work of mourning. During its composition, Duncan's lover Dick had rejected him at Pond Farm and, as Faas notes, the published version of 'An Apollonian

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<sup>588</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Robert Bertholf, Ian Reid, *Robert Duncan: Scales of the Marvelous* (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 111.

Elegy' omits the confessional first-person previously drafted, and instead speaks of two other lovers, 'black bodies of lovers,' as 'They rest, | they rock,' but the narrator does so within a quasi-free indirect discourse that still uses first-person to address Apollo and Prometheus's torn body upon the rock: 'Return you, Apollo, to ride your old sun | across that nemesis world, the night. In our dark, | in our human, we rest, we rock'.<sup>591</sup> The flippant positioning of the narrator, however, only emboldens a dialogic and dialectical transference that pushes the collection along. The punning imagery of a lover's suffering body resting and rocking under Apollo's sun explicitly relates to Prometheus' broken body. But as the poet, the lovers, and Prometheus' body cry out to the immortal sun, so too is Apollo's 'Sun' anguished in its intimate or proximate relation to mortal beings. The immortalising mortality of Apollo's 'sun' is a 'sun,' not an absolute 'Sun,' as William Everson had noted. The sun's immortal force calls upon human darkness, framing and inflaming the body of two lovers who mourn below. It is this dichotomy between a dying body and the sun's body, and between two split (homo)sexual lovers, that the collection will attempt to reconcile in a queer form of undying.

'An Apollonian Elegy' undergoes the polarisation process, as Apollo's eternal sun sings to the darkened, dying body of the previous poem. It is Apollo's 'lyre, that once gave voice | devil-strummed in Your sacred grove [...] of song as rockd ever the sun from its grave'. Duncan's 'Christ-crossed' body will be healed through the sun's loving touch, as in *The Man Who Died*, and the lovers suffering in 'An Apollonian Elegy' must also become immortal suns: 'We live in a night broken by the sun; we are | ourselves each suns to break that darkness, Man'.<sup>592</sup> The lover's body, dying for its other, sparks the musical movement of an 'undying song':

Never shall he be from me;  
 he is my very grief, my spirit's shade  
 east in the light of immortality's sun;  
 and thus, Apollo,

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<sup>591</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 73.

<sup>592</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

sing I—who die utterly—your undying song.<sup>593</sup>

The crucified body experiences Apollo's undying song, as Apollo himself suffers in an immortality defined by the perpetual dying of his love-objects, for 'Thou too hast loved: and Thou | immortality must bear | mortality's bourne'.<sup>594</sup> And yet, since the poet sings not his song but Apollo's, the undying song, which is already an sensing of immortality through the Other's mortality, is doubled in the poet's singing the Other's song. Such a perspective is that of a dying poet, who first seeks the initial touch of a healing sun, a reaching that slowly activates the movement of a resurrecting apocalypticism.

The following 'Berkeley Poems' (1946) introduce the poet's coterie while also transitioning into a series that will interchange various gender positions, gradually (de)constructing a space for the flesh. The poem 'An Elegiac Fragment' begins 'in the many chambered dawn' where 'The women' 'lean their sorrowing heads upon their arms | and gaze' at the poet. The women are 'My far away brides' to whom 'My heart asks for you, asks for you,'<sup>595</sup> but the poet curiously stands before the gaze of Woman rather than the gaze of Man, for 'There is an innocence in women | that asks me, asks me,' and 'There is a fear in women | that asks me, asks me,' and in 'her innocent gaze. Asks me, asks me, | are you the lover? are you the hunter?'<sup>596</sup> The Woman's gaze is interpreted as a transcendental Other before him, questioning his desire for the Other, establishing the poet's object of desire through a rhetorical language that repeats itself. Here Woman is not the silent sphinx but its questioner, while the poet is that Sphinx undergoing the woman's gaze and questioning: 'I am myself a sphinx before whose question | I have been doomed. Woman | the Egyptian night surrounds you'.<sup>597</sup> The poet finds himself in a dual opposition, one that is doomed to unravel as Duncan introduces an existential gap: 'Questioning females, answering males. | Question that shall never fathom its answer. | Answer that shall never fathom its question'.<sup>598</sup> The very title of the poem, 'An Elegiac Fragment,' signifies an initial sign of a question that provides both the loss inherent to

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid, pp. 78-79.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

difference within self-identification and the demand for further significations in order for the 'fragment' to be a part of a whole body.

The next poem, 'A Woman's Drunken Lament,' suddenly locates different gender positions than 'An Elegiac Fragment'. 'A Woman's Drunken Lament' speaks from the voice of a (M)other who is now speaking down to the poet as object: 'Thou art a lion, my son, an architect of lunar monoliths'.<sup>599</sup> She advises the poet, 'Seek thou my breast, for there are hours of the night | when in deserted streets watchd by an eye | thou hast a lion's savage solitude and sorrow'.<sup>600</sup> The poetic voice occupies the form of Woman yet addresses the poet, muddling the binaries into a communal dreamscape, 'thou and I, | a world we have devoured in our dreams'.<sup>601</sup> This communal world begins to take on a communal body, as the Woman's 'lament' cries for the poet to support her as a body, to move through an apocalyptic city – which is the task of 'The Ship of Death'. Here the poet is among the 'deserted streets' where 'the city's traffic dies,' but the boy's body supports communitisation as Woman speaks: 'Thou art my architect of lunar memories, | my naked ship to carry me towards Death's | forgiving shores. Thou listenth. | Aye! Aye! thou lonely ship'.<sup>602</sup> In *Apocalypse*, Lawrence had equated the bodily force of the 'sun' to that of a 'lion,' writing: 'But the sun, like a lion, loves the bright red blood of life, and can give it an infinite enrichment if we know how to receive it'.<sup>603</sup> Yet before passing through, the Woman reminds the objectified poet of her station, and, more directly, reminds the reader that the Woman is now occupying the place of the Sphinx, where the male poet was previously, and the male poet, the 'lion,' is now the 'Questioner' before her: 'Thou shalt not forget | this city whereof I am the Queen. Dear Questioner, | dear drifter in the tide of love, | bestill your terror in my calm [...] Seek thou my calm, the sphinx's breast'.<sup>604</sup> As the opposing gender positions twist into a bodily ship that will pass through an apocalyptic communitisation, the final lines signal a still more gendered and queer form of community, as the former 'son' and 'lion' brings with him an additional 'lion-ness,' as Woman next declares: 'Feast | upon my shadow, hide there thy wretched lion-ness | I

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<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Ibid.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>603</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 43.

<sup>604</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 80.



drink deeply of thy soul'.<sup>605</sup> The poet's (M)other adopts the son's lion-like loneliness, the missing fragment of his own torn body, his 'lion-ness'. The (M)other reluctantly accommodates the lion and the lion's feminised soul (lion-ness), perhaps his internalised soul(mate) who is still missing or ill-formed. Duncan's 'lion-ness' additionally retraces steps to immortality by invoking *Paradise Lost*, as William Stockton reminds us of in Milton's 'Queer Ways,' where Adam envisions an other who is 'Manlike, but different sex,' a 'Lion with Lioness'.<sup>606</sup> Thus a sexually-split identity is driven on towards death while the three identities merge into one bodily ship, albeit still fractured and reluctant.

The fragmented but tripartite identities which form the vessel in 'A Woman's Drunken Lament' – between the Mother, poet and his soul-ful 'lion-ness' – segue into the following poem 'Portrait of Two Women,' where the poet (who is now the 'I' voice), seems to be speaking to two women who console one another. The first woman shares a 'love in sorrow' as 'She lay, remotely questioning'.<sup>607</sup> Such unfulfilled questioning here signifies that the presiding difference and loss of the former questioning remains, magnified now through a three-way dialogue, which, as the titles of the poems will express, is rooted in sexual difference. While the sex and gender roles of the identities is named, the figures remain anonymous and obscure (apart from the name 'Jimenez' at one point), but it may be constructive to imagine the relation between the poet and the two women as one between the crucified poet, the Mother and his (female) soulmate, a resemblance of the Christ who watches over Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene, as the women console each other after his crucifixion. As in each of these poems, Duncan over-emphasises how a fatal loss of one (gendered) lover begets a sense of eternity. It is the belated loss that invokes the poem's romantic sense of 'this beauty' that the women long for. This 'beauty' therefore operates as the lost object and drives their mournful questioning in the refrain, 'My wrong, my wrong, my most grievous wrong. | In which comes this beauty'.<sup>608</sup> The first woman 'recites to us Keats's lovely lines',<sup>609</sup> and the 'beauty' here appears as a lost object that solicits an imagined eternity. This signified loss,

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<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Will Stockton, 'An Introduction Justifying Queer Ways,' *Early Modern Culture*, 10 (2014).

<sup>607</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 81.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>609</sup> See Keats's 'Endymion': 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever'.

a 'love in sorrow,' continues to move the body of two-women-in-loss onward towards a Williamsian destination, the beautiful thing of one's city, but here the presently aching body is the beautiful thing, as the poet proclaims: 'The yearning is the beautiful thing'.<sup>610</sup> The poem finds eternal beauty only in what the flesh lacks, for the apparently hovering spirit of the Christ-poet can only *sense* beauty from the suffering of his two women, and the two women experience eternal beauty from the suffering of the poet's body. Therefore, the abysmal gap which exists between the poet and his woman is a thing that defines beauty, because the Other signifies an external loss that is felt internally and physically. Moreover, it is the poet's internalised sense of the others's painful lament that offers a sense of beauty, but only because he himself desires to bestow such a sensation of beauty back onto the women, yet the very gap which allows such a sensation cannot be bridged. The chorus-like refrain in the first half of the poem re-states, '*If only my sense of your beauty | could flow back and fill you,*' conveying the critical divide between a poet's beautifully torn affect (which stems from the women's loss) and the poet's inability to return that sense of beauty to them.<sup>611</sup> This divide, between the poet's beautiful sense of the woman's loss and the women's passion for him, is what the poem finds to be the resurrecting *passion* of Christ, for the chorus in the second half of the poem slightly changes and echoes: '*If only my sense of your passion | could flow back and fill you*'.<sup>612</sup> The dialectical flowing, from the women's imagined suffering into the poet's beauty, which then must flow back, is a polarised circuit that exists within the sense of the poet's torn and 'yearning' flesh—a present form of bodily passion that is truly a beautiful thing. Lawrence had similarly argued such in *Apocalypse*: 'But the Apocalypse shows, by its very resistance, the things that the human heart secretly yearns after, [for] Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh'.<sup>613</sup>

The two women and their projected questioning take another turn in the following poem, 'I Am a Most Fleshly Man,' which introduces 'Heavenly City, Earthly City.' 'I Am a Most Fleshly Man' seems to carry the dialogue between genders from the preceding

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<sup>610</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 81.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81, 82.

<sup>613</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 99.

poems but now resurrects a closer sense of the poet's flesh. In 'I am a Most Fleshly Man,' we see the crucified Christ-crossed poet from the initial poem surfacing, but it is a manly flesh no longer in dialogue with women but before its male lover, most likely revisiting the two suffering lovers in 'An Apollonian Elegy'. The divisive gaps between genders and sexual difference, which had first generated the movement, still remain here but they are now between homo-sexual man, embodying a manly flesh only through the other: 'I would embrace you and name myself | anew in your flesh'.<sup>614</sup> The fairy tale narrative continues the ongoing 'questioning' of the other, rhetorically driving a lack that is still felt here in the 'disembodied love' and 'bodies we deny'. Like Lawrence's apocalypticism, the poet's self revels in a fear of death, induced by the presence of its other, yet moves towards its new flesh by committing to its 'fleshly fire':

This yearning is a vast eternity  
that waste about us questioning lies,  
and we in the limbo of disembodied love  
stare upon the bodies we deny.  
I am a most fleshly fire. 615

In this stanza, the communal 'limbo of disembodied love' is found in 'questioning lies'. The word 'lies,' however, has an ambiguous meaning. Such 'lies' can be a plural noun, as in questioning the false premises of such engendered difference or loss; or 'lies' is a verb that itself has two meanings: either the eternity provoked by the loss of self, which is integral to difference (which is the loss in question), is the very 'waste' that 'lies' down around their flaming body, or it is the very questioning itself that misleadingly 'lies'. In each case the 'us' has located itself as a communal body that is led to a flaming death by questioning the other, but instead of facing total death, the poet's spirit enters a liminal state between disembodiment and embodying his lover. Not just a body, nor only spirit, the poet's merging into a burning flesh moves like musical waves towards a queer form.

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<sup>614</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 82.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

At the close of 'I Am a Fleshly Man,' 'we hang like smoky music in the air,' which is the movement previously solicited from Apollo's 'undying song.'

The conflicted body of 'smoky music' introduces the prefatory section of 'Heavenly City, Earthly City,' entitled 'OVERTURE'. The repetitious and cyclical tropisms of 'Heavenly City' invoke not only the previous poems quite excessively, but the poem's literary derivations also build a city of their own. Such a demanding intertextuality is perhaps why scholarship has shied away from close readings of the poem. The debut collection is often referred to in biographies of Duncan, albeit quickly. The work is noted for initially getting Levertov's attention, and for Duncan's dislike of the collection for some time afterwards. Perhaps the fullest reading of the collection is Muriel Rukeyser's 1948 three-page review upon its publication, which admires Duncan's ability to escape the 'Miller-haunted writers of this [Californian] coast,' where he finds his own voice, even if he does revel in 'myth and torment' while disposed to 'sexual confusion'.<sup>616</sup> In *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, Daniel Katz notes the 'dichotomy between the divine and the temporal' in the titular poem,<sup>617</sup> and, in relating such to Spicer, implies that the poem's form provides a landscape to explore through both realms. The collection's journey through heavenly and earthly cities invokes Dante's search for Beatrice and Augustine's *The City of God*, but the 'city' is itself a dualistic trope for Duncan, as even his subsequent 'The Venice Poem' constructed Berkeley as a mirror to Venice.<sup>618</sup> Duncan's acknowledgement to Stevens may help inform the 'chiaroscuro' of Duncan's heavenly/earthly city,<sup>619</sup> yet the polarisation of Lawrence's apocalyptic microcosm teases out the fleshly substance within three of the poem's major plotlines. First, the poet's mortal body will seek to reclaim and touch his male Redeemer and Beloved (i.e. Christ and Apollo's sun). Second, the psychical yearning of the poet, personified by Orpheus,

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<sup>616</sup> Muriel Rukeyser, 'Myth and Torment: Heavenly City, Earthly City by Robert Duncan'. *Poetry*, 72:1 (April 1948), pp. 48-51.

<sup>617</sup> *The Poetry of Jack Spicer*, p. 115.

<sup>618</sup> *The San Francisco Renaissance*, p. 56. Davidson also notes that the 'city' was itself a key trope for Berkeley poets such as Spicer. See Davidson's chapter, 'The City Redefined': Community and Dialogue in Jack Spicer,' p. 150.

<sup>619</sup> Wallace Stevens, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), p. 61. Duncan's yearning movement rests between sun and moon in a 'chiaroscuro' which is also similar to Stevens's 'The Man with the Blue Guitar': 'In a chiaroscuro where | One sits and plays the blue guitar. There are also resonances with 'Sunday Morning' and 'Idea of Order at Key West'.

will paradoxically seek the eternal sun by delving deeper into the darkened hell where Eurydice lies, rehearsing the myth of Icarus but through the journey between two lovers rather than between Icarus and the Sun. And lastly, the poet's natural flesh, what is introduced as an 'apish form,' is depicted as a 'sea lion' and 'sea leopard' basking in the sun. This last image, of a body resting upon the rocks at sea, is but a final embodiment of the two torn lovers who stood upon Prometheus's rock in 'An Apollonian Elegy'.

The poem's opening term, 'Beauty,' arrives as that eternal loss from 'Portrait of Two Women' and is defined in the opening line as 'a bright and terrible disk'. This light but dark disk symbolises just how one's yearning for an external beauty or immortal self manifests only in one's changing flesh. The image of the 'bright and terrible disk' is revealed to be the very beholding of an internalised sun. The outward brightness, yet terrible darkness, proves to be a human's vision of the sun after looking at it directly— in trying to touch it. One's bodily perception of the sun, from those who behold it, appears as a bright black-disk burning on our mortal eyes, a fading image scorched into our vision, emboldened when our eyes are closed.<sup>620</sup> This fleshly image of the sun resembles Lawrence's undying microcosm, just as it enlightened Duncan's Prometheus. The first stanza reads:

Beauty is a bright and terrible disk.  
It is the light of our inward heaven  
and the light of the heaven in which we walk.  
We talk together. Let our love leaven  
and enlighten our talk! O we are dim.  
We are dim shadows before our fiery selves.  
We are mere moments before our eternities.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Gérard de Nerval, *Gérard de Nerval: 'el desdichado'* (Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1953), p. 311. Thus Duncan also invokes Gerard de Nerval's 'El Desdichado,' where the poet is rendered '*le Ténébreux, - le Veuf, - l'inconsolé*': '*Ma seule Etoile est morte, - et mon | luth constellé | Porte le Soleil noir de la Mélancholie*'.

<sup>621</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 84.

The poem begins within the presiding communal body of a 'We,' the lovers of 'An Apollonian Elegy' who face Apollo's sun. Evoking the myth of 'Icarus,' Duncan projects how the fiery sun merely reflects the dying shadows of 'our' body: 'In the blaze of his blinded eyes | the disk shows black, burn'd in his mind a charcoal sun'.<sup>622</sup> When reading the poem, this initial grasping of the sun's bodily image is a central paradox that can help disentangle the poem's blurred binaries between reality and imagination, or image and reflection. It is the imagination which desires the Sun as a real and lasting reality, but in reality the sun is a perception of the mortal body that imagines. The image of the sun, in other words, is defined by the transcendental and physical reflection of it, for 'We are dim shadows before our fiery selves,' 'mere moments before our eternities'.

Duncan would later list the poem's corresponding tropes and map a sense of self in the likes of Lawrence. Duncan sketched out the main images: 'Heaven as inward state: Heavenly City, Earthly City. I answer. Fire. Self (mirror image to Sun) Sun (as Source)'.<sup>623</sup> Heaven is here internalised, 'an inward state,' while Earthly being appears to extend outward. And like the self in *Apocalypse*, which is a dying illusion, Duncan's 'Self' is but a 'mirror image' of the 'Sun,' reflecting the heat of the Other, while the poet's body is the mirror being looked upon. The poem continues:

In the dark of my manhood the flamy self  
leaps like the sun's hairy image  
caught in the black of an obscure mirror.  
This is the apish chiaroscuro of our source, the sun.  
This is my age, my inward heaven.  
The city of my passion is reveal'd in its beauty.<sup>624</sup>

The poet's organic connection with the sun reflects the poet's body as the sun's image, rendering the sun a 'hairy image' in turn. The 'apish' image of the Sun's dying body also recalls Edith Sitwell's apocalyptic, WWII lyric 'Lullaby' (1942), where 'All is equal –

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>623</sup> Peter O'Leary, *Gnostic Contagion: Robert Duncan & the Poetry of Illness* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>624</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 84.

blindness, sight, | There is no depth, there is no height,' 'The Judas-coloured sun is gone, | And with the Ape thou art alone'.<sup>625</sup> Sitwell said her poem is 'the voice of materialism from the heart of despair, singing a lullaby for the dying world,' but in Duncan we again see a sexualized and polarised microcosm as well, one coming into flesh. Just as Duncan sees the Self as a mirror image of a Sun and relies upon the body as that which holds the Sun, Lawrence too had concluded in *Apocalypse*: 'we shall find that the mind has no existence by itself, it is only the glitter of the sun on the surface of the waters,' and the microcosm must 're-establish the living organic connections, with the cosmos, the sun and earth [...] Start with the sun, and the rest will slowly, slowly happen'.<sup>626</sup>

The poem then enters Part 'I,' which revolves around the poet's passion for his lost 'Redeemer'. More specifically, Part I introduces the poet's 'fear' for his dying self, and his reliance upon his bodily passion to transform it. Unlike the fear of a Christian, the poet's passion is its earthly destination. But here the poet is not Christ, but, like the position of his two women, reaches for Christ's body in order to embody manly flesh.<sup>627</sup> It is the Redeemer's 'sun,' 'your sun,' which the poet requires, which is 'the golden heart of that deep body,' that hairy and fleshly light.<sup>628</sup> Part I of the poem also unfolds as a dialogue, like the preceding poems, between the poet and 'The voices of the night'.<sup>629</sup> The poet will convey his 'fear' of not locating his Beloved's body, thus losing his self, but the chorus will attempt to console the poet by explaining that his Redeemer is already dead. The poet cries out: '*Could I but dream and dreaming gaze | upon the paradise of his eyes,*' yet '*he is gone,*' and '*I know the heavy change upon the world. | I fear. I fear*'.<sup>630</sup> The chorus reassures him that he is not dreaming, for it is his very fear and loss that have awakened him: '*awakened by the passing of your Redeemer,*' but the poet is only '*awakened to gaze*

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<sup>625</sup> Richard Greene, *Edith Sitwell: Avant garde Poet, English Genius* (London: Hachette Digital, 2011), p. 274. See also Sitwell's *I Live Under a Black Sun*.

<sup>626</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 200.

<sup>627</sup> Greg Hewett, 'Revealing 'The Torso': Robert Duncan and the Process of Signifying Male Homosexuality,' *Contemporary Literature*, 35:3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 522-546. The poet Thom Gunn, in 'Homosexuality in Robert Duncan's Poetry,' generally saw Duncan's 1946 representations of Christ as homosexual, and Greg Hewett notes that such renditions are inspired by Auden and George Herbert.

<sup>628</sup> *The Collected Early Poems and Plays*, p. 85.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid.

*upon thy dead | and speechless self, touched by that angel | awakener of the dead*'.<sup>631</sup> The chorus thus argues that '*Thou has no Redeemer,*' but merely '*a ghost*' which '*touches them in passing and awakens the heart | to face its death*'.<sup>632</sup> The chorus, in other words, reassures the poet that he is indeed alive and awake, but only because the fear of a dying self is indeed the very presence of the Other's sun touching him. To respond, in quite a defiant manner, the poet quotes from hymnals and sings Apollo's '*undying song,*' for the poet now knows '*that my Redeemer lives,*'<sup>633</sup> for '*His sun, is the radiant song*' which burns and '*consumes*' the '*Earthly paradise in which I walk*'.<sup>634</sup> Part I then closes with the poet acknowledging that the '*beauty*' of his '*Earthly city*' is '*like the face of my Beloved | that is torn in the rage of an inward flood*'.<sup>635</sup> The poet is therefore quite torn or polarised, as he awakens into a reality only by the touch of an imagined sun, and it is the '*inward flood*' of waters, which move in the beautiful tides of fear, passion and '*dismay,*' that reform the living body of his external Other.

To illustrate the psychical journey of the poet's search for his Beloved, where a descent into the dark internal waters can embrace an external Sun, the poem turns to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in Part 'II'. Indeed, in the poem, Orpheus's own loss and search for Eurydice is a psychical fairy tale, a journey towards the immortality of a gendered love-object that reflects a plunge into hell. Apollo's song in '*An Apollonian Elegy,*' formerly sung as '*ai ai,*' now becomes a cry for Orpheus, '*AI AI Orpheus*'.<sup>636</sup> Orpheus's submersion into dark waters, as a result of reaching for the Sun, is also depicted as the fall of Icarus:

Where is the dark and forgiving sea, flood  
or rage or sorrow to sweep thru my body,  
vast poem, ocean of the soul's resounding deep,  
where falling Icarus falls to his rest. <sup>637</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

<sup>633</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>634</sup> Ibid.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.



Such apocalypticism sees self-consciousness as but an internal reflection of the sun, a reflection that appears only on the surface of the intervening waters. Thus the poet reaches up by reaching down, burned by the sun while being saturated by it: 'He I am who torn in my flesh | return at last to my lost Eurydice, | the inward sea, terror's sister-face, to receive my Icarus,'<sup>638</sup> for 'The man in the solitude of his poetic form | finds his self-consciousness defined | by the boundaries of a non-committal sea | that washes, washes the reluctant mind | and carves from its shores its secret coves'.<sup>639</sup> The poet's 'solitude' and 'self-consciousness' are thereby shaped by the contours of a constantly moving sea; fluid tides pulled by the tissue's connection with sun and moon.

Due to the dire nature of such a life, the poem closes by questioning the very significance of the sun. Though the poem's body seems to cruise towards its life in death, a resting place which rocks upon the waters, the very questioning of the poem's purpose is a gesture of the restlessness and resistance that gives such bodily formation a sense of itself. The poem becomes flippant, for 'The praise of the sun is a nostalgic poem,' and 'The praise of the sun | is purposeless,' and yet the poem concludes:

The praise of the sun is a renewing poem.  
 The earth replenishes, replenishes her beauty  
     [...] We walk in the light  
 of beauty's calm; our city lies about us  
 murmuring, drifts in an evening humanity.  
 There is wisdom of night and day,  
 older than that proud blaze of sun,  
 in which we rest, a passion, primitive to love,  
 of perishing, a praise and recreation of the sun.  
 My earthly city is revealed in its beauty. <sup>640</sup>

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<sup>638</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-91.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

The poet resembles the 'sea-lions' and 'Sea leopards' bathing upon the rocks where Prometheus had been beaten, where the lion and lion-ness had set sail. A final image thus depicts the creatures barking tunes at the sun, as they rest and wrestle each other upon the sea-shore rocks: 'Turbulent Pacific! the sea-lion bark | in ghostly conversations and sun themselves | upon the sea-conditioned rocks'.<sup>641</sup> In 'An Apollonian Elegy,' it was the undying song of Apollo's sun that had solicited the lovers' suffering: 'The sun in his trumpet,' 'burn white the black bodies of lovers, burn black | their white souls in the awake of night,' and there 'Each lover – Promethean – has stolen from you | his body, Your lyre, that once gave voice'.<sup>642</sup> In the closing of 'Heavenly City, Earthly City,' these lovers revel 'across the ruddy music of its waves,' where the 'waves' is another a playful pun, mixing Apollo's music with the golden waters within: 'its voices merge in a pulsating counterpoint | to sing the wonders of the sun, | the beasts of the sun and the watry beasts'.<sup>643</sup> These two sea beasts, who bask upon the watery rocks, are the fleshly figures who lay between the sun and the dark waters that reflect it, for as the 'sea lion' basks upon the rocks, the 'sea leopards' are twice found to 'cough in the halls of our sleep, swim in the waters of salt and wrack of ships'.<sup>644</sup> The great difficulty in reading the poem's form thus lies in continuing to follow the reflected ships of each 'counterpoint'. But when the poem is held within the context of Lawrence's apocalypticism, the polarised microcosm of the poet's flesh can perhaps surface more clearly.

A close reading of *Heavenly City, Earthly City* not only offers a fresh perspective of the pillars that would form much of Duncan's later poetry, but the communal body-politics that took shape in Berkeley come through here as well. Lawrence provides significant context. In accounting for Lawrence, the critical usages of gender and sexual difference become pronounced and performed, which are essential for Duncan's corresponding work. Yet Lawrence's politics on the sexual dynamics of the body, in such works as *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, appear increasingly grounded in the microcosm of *Apocalypse*, as they do in Duncan's early Berkeley poems. Though Duncan does not refer to Lawrence's 'microcosm' explicitly (from what I have gathered thus far), the thesis of

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.

*Apocalypse* shines through. Lawrence's fleshly microcosm primarily aims to work through the affects of fear and yearning, which would otherwise reaffirm self-consciousness, and does so by attending to the internal and external forces acting upon the flesh, which may slowly dissolve a sense of individuality as much as it creates it. In *Heavenly City, Earthly City* we see the acute merging of Lawrentian coterie at the beginning of the Berkeley Renaissance and the poetics of Duncan's bi-sexual fairy tale. The merging, between Duncan's poetics and his coterie, seems to rest upon the body of Lawrence's apocalypse.

## The Queer Space of Edenic Touch in 'The Torso'

1960-1968

Robert Duncan's earliest collections combine movements of resurrection and apocalypse, and their intersection often lies within the realm of touch, provided by his guide or lover. Duncan's poetics regarding naked touch are well-known in their unmasking of homosexual intimacy, but the revitalising space of touch, wherein old selves die while new identities arise, is an eternalising space that perpetually invokes the Garden of Eden, and thus the relations between Adam and Eve. Though Duncan criticism may overlook references to Eden's sexual difference when analysing the contexts and content of same-sex relations, it is precisely the psychical conflicts inherent to sexual difference that Duncan returns to when political and social crises intensify. World War II had fueled Duncan's bi-sexual psychodramas, and when the Cold War and Civil Rights movement escalated in the '60s, Duncan's poetry retraced the roots leading back to the Tree of Life, as Eric Mottram observes in Duncan's *Roots and Branches* (1962),<sup>645</sup> and it is an Edenic scene that Duncan continually ends up reliving in his 1960s poetry.

In order to follow Duncan's endeavor to reform the politics of sexual difference, particularly in the 1960s, an Edenic thread should be uncovered, one that runs through many of his well-known 'homosexual' poems, such as 'Night Scenes' (1964) and 'The Torso' (1968). While an absolute origin for sexual difference cannot be reached by Duncan's poet, the relationalities reperformed within physical touch seem to render the psychical life of Eden as a site of queer resistance and occupation. Duncan's general return to Lawrence in 1960, and his rereading of Lawrence's Eden poems more specifically, can inform this thread, which climaxes in the poem 'The Torso' within *Bending the Bow* (1968). Lawrence's Edenic poetry appears to contest society's presiding norms on several levels, which become relatable to Duncan's subversive return to Eden. Lawrence and his lover at the time, Freida, was the current wife of Lawrence's former

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<sup>645</sup> Eric Mottram, 'Heroic Survival through Ecstatic Forms: Robert Duncan's *Roots and Branches*,' in Amy Evans and Shamoan Zamir, ed. *The Unruly Garden* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 153.

professor, and, as they run away to Italy and explore each others bodies, it is Eve's touch which penetrates the body of the poet. The embodiment of Eve's touch allows for an interiority to open up, where a new 'I' arises while previous selves die. Such an eternalising space, however, is an act of protest for Lawrence, who likens such touch with storming the gates of Paradise. When following Duncan's politicised Edenic poetry up through 'The Torso,' the poet's relation to woman's bodily position remains pivotal, yet 'The Torso *Passages* 18' will aesthetically map out an Edenic relationality and space that restructures sexual difference and language within the queer bodily form of the poem.

In the 1960s Duncan's poetry becomes increasingly serialised, as tropes, motifs, narratives, and poems stretch across collections, testing any close reading with exhaustion. A reinterpretation of 'The Torso' will first begin by accounting for the poem's Lawrentian and Edenic heritage. When Duncan formally introduced *Bending the Bow*, he referred to Lawrence for political context and invoked Lawrence as a general model for entering the structures of language. This political and general evocation of Lawrence also speaks to Duncan's ongoing study of Lawrence's sexual politics. Within *Bending the Bow*'s overtly political and perhaps most well-known poem, 'Up Rising *Passages* 23,' Duncan cites Lawrence directly. The poem begins by stating that '[Lyndon B.] Johnson' will join the company of 'Hitler and Stalin,' 'to work his fame | with planes roaring out from Guam over Asia,' stirring up what seems like a 'Texas barbeque | of Asia, Africa, and all the Americas' for the 'business of war'.<sup>646</sup> America's imperial violence, continues Duncan, is 'the mania, the ravening eagle of America | as Lawrence saw him "bird of men that are masters, lifting rabbit-blood of the myriads up into . . .".'<sup>647</sup> Commenting on the poem in his 1969 lecture, 'Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife,' Duncan mentions Whitman's 'Eighteenth Presidency' as an inspiration behind the political series of *Passages* which run through *Bending the Bow*, yet it is 'the vision of Blake and of Lawrence [who] informed my own vision in 'Up Rising'.<sup>648</sup> In particular, Duncan is drawing from Lawrence's own critique of American politics in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), where, Duncan states, Lawrence critiqued 'the American Eagle as more than an

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<sup>646</sup> Robert Duncan, *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 81.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

arbitrary symbol of the nation'.<sup>649</sup> In 'Up Rising' itself, 'the ravening eagle of America,' which 'Lawrence saw,' refers to Lawrence's 'Eagle in New Mexico'. In his lecture Duncan also cites Lawrence's depiction of the 'turkey-cock,'<sup>650</sup> a bird Benjamin Franklin thought should replace the eagle's 'arrogance'.<sup>651</sup> Taking his cue from Lawrence, Duncan states that the 'turkey-cock' is 'superimposed' within his own 'Up Rising,' alongside his Blakean imagery of 'the hydra' and 'the Old Dragon'.<sup>652</sup> Sarah Ehlers has noted that Blake's poetics in *Bending the Bow* are more evident within the collection's use of dual oppositions for regenerative purposes;<sup>653</sup> a poetics of conflict described quite straightforwardly in 'Man's Fulfillment in Order and Strife'. Such political oppositioning, to incite strife when locating order, is also showcased in the collection's quarrel with sexual politics.

The New World Order is opposed in 'Up Rising *Passages* 23' and throughout the collection's series of *Passages*, as the very form of Duncan's language is meant to resist the dominant structures of identity and sexual politics. In 'Stage Directions *Passages* 30,' America's imperialism reigns through casted narratives that inscribe sexual identity, 'the place of the Real':

The nation has gone so far in wrong/ Truth grows fateful  
And true song gives forth portents of woe. Sublime

Forbidden intensities convert the personal,  
and from what *I* am  
Masks of an old pageant, from my world and time  
Portentous rimes, foreshadowing history become a plot demands.<sup>654</sup>

Characteristic of the collection as a whole, the poem's form structurally resists such 'Melodrammatic' plots, in order to emerge from 'the dying body of America,' 'my own

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<sup>649</sup> Ibid, p. 222.

<sup>650</sup> From Lawrence's poem 'Turkey-Cock,' which precedes 'Eagle in New Mexico'.

<sup>651</sup> *Bending the Bow*, p. 223.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid, p. 223.

<sup>653</sup> Sarah E. Ehlers, 'Duncan's Miltonic Persuasion,' in *Reading Duncan Reading: Robert Duncan and the Poetics of Derivation*, ed. by Stephen Collis and Graham Lyons (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), p. 7.

<sup>654</sup> *Bending the Bow*, p. 131.

dying body'.<sup>655</sup> When reading the poem, Eric Mottram writes, 'Duncan's work is never removed from that continuous set of coercions and permissions generically called politics, never unaware of living in the permitted and still desiring release into erotic and creative renewals'.<sup>656</sup> Mottram's personal epigraph for this reading of Duncan's late work, 'a law placed on someone is disorder, not order',<sup>657</sup> is also axiomatic for Duncan's restructuration of Eden and Adamic language in *Bending the Bow*, particularly in 'The Torso Passages 18'.

Along with the series of *Passages*, *Bending the Bow* is comprised of the 'Structure of Rime' series, which continues from *The Opening of the Field* (1960) and *Roots and Branches* (1964). When introducing 'Structure of Rime' for *Bending the Bow* in his lecture, Duncan relates to Lawrence's inverse mode of entering, or being inscribed into, the structuration of his own written characters:

I started a series without end called 'Structure of Rime' in which the poem could talk to me, a poetic seance, and, invoked so, persons of the poem appeared as I wrote to speak. I had only to keep the music of the invocation going and to take down what actually came to me happening in the course of the poem. Lawrence tells us that, once he was at work on a novel his characters took over, having their own life there. He had only to follow, hard put to keep up with them. The creatures of this world are not puppets but each his own most intense center of the creator's intent. Lawrence comes to realize not what he means but what his work means, as we reading too come to realize, in what happens in his creatures' lives.<sup>658</sup>

Reading Lawrence as an author who 'had only to follow' his characters in order to create anew, Duncan raises a notion similar to Barthes' reading of Proust in 'The Death of the

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>656</sup> *The Unruly Garden*, p. 205.

<sup>657</sup> Eric Mottram, 'Robert Duncan: The Possibilities of an Adequate History and of a Poetics of Event,' in Amy Evans and Shamoon Zamir, ed. *The Unruly Garden* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 153.

<sup>658</sup> Robert Duncan, *Collected Essays and Other Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), p. 215.

Author,' where the identity of 'Proust' was created out of his written life. Such a typical structuralist position, however, is perhaps critical for Duncan's rehearsals of Adam and Eve in the collection, which are explicitly cast as reformed narratives. Duncan's habitual stress upon structure and order, fantasy and narrative, in order to render poetry as a field of strife and conflict, is a critical component for his Edenic poetry, since it is in the myth of Eden where language, sexual difference, the Law and death are created.

The relation between Adam and Eve appears regularly in Duncan's *oeuvre*,<sup>659</sup> often with homosexual substitutions, but in 1960 his reliance upon Eden seems to return with an anxiety prompted by foreign and domestic wars. When writing to Levertov on August 22nd, 1960, Duncan expresses a 'funk,' a sort of writer's block, but remedies such by turning to Lawrence and H.D.'s work during WWI, which leads to Duncan's ultimate reprieve in Lawrence's Edenic poems of 1917, specifically 'Paradise Re-Entered' and 'Elysium'. Describing his recently failed attempt to complete a series of poems, Duncan writes, 'There's a part or maybe two, fragments of a problematic sequence referring to fairy tales—but I'd messd up the first part and have had to discard it completely,' but 'As it is now, I've perhaps to take the cue from Lawrence and return to the thing I was trying to say until I find it'.<sup>660</sup> Duncan's present 'funk' wonderfully affirms Stan Persky's observation of Duncan's 1962 production of his recently written *A Play of Adam's Way*: '[it's] a play about Adam & Eve and the sun and moon and Atlantis and woman all that usual shit he writes about when he aint got no poem'.<sup>661</sup> Duncan's 'funk' also invokes Lawrence's essay, 'The State of Funk,' which describes both a social and individual hindrance resulting from one's non-acceptance of reality's natural change. One must remember, writes Lawrence, that 'We change. You and I, we change and change vitally, as the years go on. New feelings arise in us, old values depreciate, new values arise'.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> For early examples, see 'King Hayden of Maimi Beach' (*The Years As Catches*), 'The Mirror (*Medieval Scenes*)', 'At Home in Eden' (*Appearances*), 'Adam's Song' (*A Book of Resemblances*), 'First Invention on the Theme of the Adam,' 'Short Invention on the Theme of the Adam' (*Letters: Poems mcmliii-mcmivi*), etc.

<sup>660</sup> *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, p. 256.

<sup>661</sup> *Poet Be Like God*, p. 239. Also see Jarnot's *The Ambassador from Venus*, p. 218, regarding the original title of the play, *A Play of Adam's Way*, otherwise known as *Adam's Way* upon publication.

<sup>662</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Late Essays and Articles, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 221.



Lawrence then links a praxis of working through 'the state of funk' to his own poetics and novelistic form. Duncan's technique here, for writing through a state of funk, is returning to Lawrence. The letter documents Duncan's initial step: a 'reading of H.D.'s new novel [*Bid Me To Live*],' which her editor thought was dedicated to Lawrence, and so too had Duncan 'gathered first impulsively that it was about an affair with Lawrence'.<sup>663</sup> What appears to interest Duncan most in the novel is the 'charade' which H.D.'s semi-autobiographical characters play, a game Lawrence's character (Rico) arranges wherein they reenact the Garden of Eden.<sup>664</sup> By first reading about Lawrence through H.D., and their poetic rehearsal of Eden, Duncan gets 'led [...] back too to re-read Lawrence's poems. Where I came upon poems as they always are at Lawrence's hand for me, so fresh and revealing – and I long when I read to be able to speak in a language as he does that reflects birdsong or flower's perfume'.<sup>665</sup> As in the 1940s, Duncan finds himself in a political, homosexual, and war-time crisis, but returns to his fix: 'I wanted to re-read his work thru the war years, along with [H.D.'s] poems'.<sup>666</sup> Duncan then quotes a poem in full, Lawrence's 'Paradise Re-entered,' highlighting the poem's perfected imagism and rhyme, the 'innocence of the simplistic rhymes,' with 'such a sure sense surrounding it'.<sup>667</sup> But Duncan also notes how 'the final quatrains fail,' and so it is the second poem, Lawrence's 'Elysium,' which stands out all the more. Lawrence's 'Elysium,' Duncan proclaims, 'is now one of the immortal poems for me – and I send it as if it were from my own heart,' again quoting the poem in full.<sup>668</sup> Duncan's 'immortal' poem not only works through sexual difference during a time of war, but locates an undying space – an Elysium – within the Other's naked form.

Before reading Lawrence's poems, however, Duncan's particular approach to Eden in the early 1960s can be introduced with his comments on Eden in *The H.D. Book* (1957-1964), along with an analysis of his own play, *Adam's Way*, and its adaptation into 'Narrative Bridges for *Adam's Way*' in *Bending the Bow* (1968). In each work, Duncan is

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<sup>663</sup> *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, p. 256.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid. In *Bid Me to Live*, Rafe and Bella (Aldington and his mistress) play Adam and Eve, and Julia (H.D.) plays the apple tree while Rico (Lawrence) instructs her on how to dance (Frieda plays the serpent).

<sup>665</sup> Ibid, pp. 256-257.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid, p. 257.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid, p. 257.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid, p. 258.

particularly interested in how the psyche is a split-subject that is inscribed into a preexisting narrative, yet the original Author of such characters cannot be known, allowing the characters to explore (or create) their roles. In *The H.D. Book* Duncan admits that the poet's search for a revolutionary politic may be in re-examining Adam's inherent divisions. Duncan writes, 'those of us who saw and acknowledged what we saw came into a work or quest: to gather up out of the darkness the betrayal of the ideas of democracy and of communism the truth of that vision that was torn asunder. It was the new Adam, this individual man who was the brother of all men'.<sup>669</sup> In Adam, as in Eden, Duncan envisions not an absolute origin but the material trace left from a primal division or fall. Duncan's occultic or alchemistic Adam, in other words, is a split-atom, a written character upon the splitting cell, as Duncan continues: 'Our secret Adam is written in the script of the primal cell'.<sup>670</sup> Defining Adam as an inscription upon a splitting cell, Duncan's poetic does not necessarily perceive the body of sexual difference as a natural thing, but as an additionally splintered thing in language. Duncan continues by adding that such a written split-character is no longer an 'archetype' or image of 'mankind,' but part of 'the larger Nature' that demands an ulterior 'comparison' of all things, the 'alien kind' outside established 'boundaries'.<sup>671</sup> Upon the body as upon the poem, Duncan continues, lies the makeup of a primal scene – traces of an unknown origin for psychical (dis)orders: 'In the psychoanalysis of the outcast and vagabound, the neurotic and psychotic, we slowly discover the hidden features of our own emotional and mental processes. We hunt for the key to language itself in the dance of the bees or in the chemical code of the chromosomes'.<sup>672</sup> Works such as *Adam's Way* and 'Narrative Bridge for *Adam's Way*' continue to combine such a Freudian biologism and (post)structuralism by illustrating Duncan's rewriting of the creation story, of that first split-cell and its inscription into lack.

Duncan's *Adam's Way* interrogates the identity politics of an Adam and a Eve who do not know their Author, which introduces the bi-sexual and queer psychical community of Duncan's Edenic scene. The *personae dramatis* in *Adam's Way* enter and exit the *mise-*

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<sup>669</sup> *The H.D. Book*, p. 123.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid, p. 153.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, pp. 153-154.

*en-scène* of Eden much like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the characters are aware that they are written characters, characters who must inquire about their unknown Author. Instead of Adam and Eve passively deriving their identities from a prescribed image of a masculine God (He who walked among them in *Genesis*), Duncan's characters question their different identities by questioning each other, thereby imagining the multifarious identity of their absent Author retroactively. For example, the morphing character of 'Erda-Eve' asks Michael about the rimation in her identity:

*Erda-Eve*    Eve?   Adam?  
*Michael*    Eve-Adam you were before the play began,  
                  our Author's image here below <sup>673</sup>

Since neither Adam nor Eve are complete in themselves, the Author's image is a consortium of mutable identities. Adam and Eve are unstable, as even 'Eve' becomes 'Erda Eve' and then 'Eve. | Not Erda, but Eve'.<sup>674</sup> 'Erda,' for Duncan, resembles 'fancy' and the 'substance in Adam's dream,' 'an invisible called music' which is 'an air or melody previous to its element'.<sup>675</sup> Erda acts as the substance from which the elements of Adam are comprised; an invisible but maternal material; 'Erda' becomes 'earth more than earth'.<sup>676</sup> For Adam, Erda provides not only the organic womb-like space for both psychical and physical life, but a substance that is itself signified in sexual difference: Erda becomes 'Womb-man of Adam's life'.<sup>677</sup> The notation of Eve, on the other hand, is 'Wife-man of Adam's life,' an image of the helper Adam asked for, in the image of his self, 'Wife-man,' but one that came before him and stands before him.<sup>678</sup> The 'body' of Eve, who was once Erda-Eve, is thus defined as '*The Pod*,' a body which allows Adam to dialectically explore the form from which his identity derives.<sup>679</sup> In the play's obscure

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<sup>673</sup> Robert Duncan, *The Collected Later Poems and Plays* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2014), p. 235.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid, p. 234.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid, p. 235.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid, p. 236.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid, p. 219.

manner, it seems that Eve's body is man-like, is a sexualised body in Adam's image, in which resides the identity of 'Wife-man':

The dreams that from the groins of such  
leafy seclusions go abroad  
are larvae from which seductive forms  
confused the purposes of God and broke  
from Adam's side a body for Eve  
*The Pod* this vegetable Dame calls her Cabinet.  
Adam again and again, unbroken,  
unriven from his green womb returns.<sup>680</sup>

The Author's 'purpose' here is indeed confusing. It seems that Adam returns to the lost 'green womb' of Erda by confronting Eve's 'Cabinet'. As Adam and Eve walk in Eden, and question each other, chorus-like angels such as Michael attempt to provide guidance, but it is the later edition of 'Narrative Bridges for *Adam's Way*' which develops this former narrative.

'Narrative Bridges' revisits Adam's primal 'cell,' which is the 'Pod' or Body that gendered fairies now tear Adam from, causing Adam to fall into Eden's 'Void' of named things and sexual desire. Adam's Pod is seen hanging in Eden by various vines, vines that act as an umbilicus to man's unknown source. The 'grape-vine, rose-vine, bean-vine or green ivy twines'<sup>681</sup> here are also those 'cords' being stretched and played throughout *Bending the Bow*. By retracing these navel cords, as if to follow musical chords, Duncan tracks a source that is recreated in his attempts to return. Such cords will lead the poet back to the 'navel' of 'The Torso,' soon discussed.<sup>682</sup> In 'The Pod of Adam,' the green vine or umbilicus provides both touch and vision for the unborn: 'Each tip of green search in touch is an organ of sight, a secret eye'.<sup>683</sup> Through his umbilicus Adam 'has a kind of sight then of Pook and Bobbin who come with Erda to confront the womb in which he

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid, p. 219

<sup>681</sup> *Bending the Bow*, p. 103.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Ibid.

grows,' to where 'the fairies come' and 'rip open the hanging pod, tearing down the walls'.<sup>684</sup> The feminine fairies tear open Adam's 'pod,' causing the infantile Adam to fall from God's 'Love'. This primal event, of tearing down the walls of Adam's Pod so that he does not remain whole, was prescribed and forecast in *Adam's Way*, as Bobbin in *Adam's Way* told Erda: 'Tear the walls of his magic down | before his sleep ripens and he wakes a king'.<sup>685</sup> In *Adam's Way* Duncan compared Adam's 'fall' from his 'pea-pod' into a realm of self-creation to that of Michaelangelo's painting, 'The Creation of Adam,' where God nearly touches Adam,<sup>686</sup> but here the Author only touches Adam through Erda-Eve's body: 'Michaelango drew his Author – mine's the same – | reaching out so | to touch poor Adam's extended finger in a game | calld "Pass-the-Soul," no doubt'.<sup>687</sup> Having fallen into a bodily relation with Erda-Eve, who now becomes Eve-Adam upon awakening from his pod, Adam and Eve form two split or lacking identities that cannot be named but refer to a whole, and holy absent, Author, an identity which their joined body only now creates. Eve tells Adam in *Adam's Way*: 'There's a way of speaking that's most like this | where thought and feeling is not our own | but belongs to a voice that would transmute | into a music joy and grief, into one living tree | in which beyond our selves we find release'.<sup>688</sup> As in Lawrence's Eden poems, Adam's new selves are created out of the severed body that Eve provides.

Adam's release in 'Narrative Bridges' is but a fall into 'God's void,' 'the Void' which is Eden itself. Adam's loss of an Absolute, and his fall into lack and difference, now becomes the seed of his sexual desire, as Duncan continues: 'and of Eden (is it dream or memory? homeland of the pleasure principle in the libidinal sea, an island girt round with forbidding walls?)'.<sup>689</sup> This 'homeland' of original difference is not only the cause of Adam's desire but, at the same time, the cause of Adam's desire to name things. In *Adam's Way*, Adam had stated, 'I'll name all things anew for Eden's sake',<sup>690</sup> and in

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<sup>684</sup> Ibid, pp. 103-104.

<sup>685</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 225.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid, p. 228.

<sup>688</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>689</sup> *Bending the Bow*, p. 106.

<sup>690</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 240.

'Narrative Bridges,' 'Adam would name the things of this world his'.<sup>691</sup> However, the narrator does not condone such symbolisation and recognises that the first 'childlike' naming is rather an assignation of loneliness onto a thing: "'the Word'" has a peculiar meaning verging upon vanity, and in the childlike vain pleasure of the poet with his words'.<sup>692</sup> The poet here, along with Samuel and Eve, falls back and observes 'the loneliness of named things'.<sup>693</sup>

Taking his 'cue' from Lawrence, from both the reenactment of Eden in *Bid Me To Live* and in Lawrence's Eden poetry, Duncan's *Adam's Way* and 'Narrative Bridges for *Adam's Way*' not only perform gender roles but do so through the subject's relation to the Other body. What Lawrence's Edenic poetry offers is a closer look into the realm of embodied touch, Duncan's newborn 'Pod' of the other, which is a physical space in a feminised Other, one severed from an absolute and original identity. The space of touch in Lawrence's Edenic poetry, within the symbolisation of sexual difference, is also an occupied state of an 'I' that is suspended from death, on the one hand, and a new life, on the other. The poems cited by Duncan come from Lawrence's early Rhyming Poems in *Look! We Have Come Through!*, a collection serialising Lawrence's 'elopement' with Frieda.<sup>694</sup> 'Paradise Re-entered' arrives late in the collection, after the night-scenes of 'December Night,' 'New Years Night,' 'Valentine's Night,' 'Birth Night' and 'Rabbit Snared In The Night,' and 'Paradise Re-entered' punningly appears just before 'Coming Awake'. The title alone alludes to a structural interruption, 'Re-Entered,' that is apparently a repetition, and yet there is a new sense of militancy in the poem. The opening stanza first locates the paradisaal gates as the Other's body:

Through the straight gate of passion,  
Between the bickering fire  
Where flames of fierce love tremble

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<sup>691</sup> *Bending the Bow*, p. 110.

<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes also refers to their escape together as an elopement, but acknowledges that Frieda had not fully intended on breaking her former marriage.

The poet here enters Paradise through the gate upon Eve's flaming body, which Duncan also locates in *Adam's Way*: 'But break the bond, | and you will be his woman, only you | will be the gate called Eve'.<sup>696</sup> Perhaps it's worth noting that Lawrence does not seem to be advocating the breaking of woman's body, or forcing himself upon her private gates, but rather, through a joined passion, they are breaking a sacred law that has kept their sexuality oppressed. The following lines then exhibit the 'innocent rhymes' Duncan commented on, which cradle the lover's 'approach' to 'the flamed-burnt porches' of flesh, which is apparently considered a blasphemous endeavor, but one wherein 'we' are 'sure' of 'our sanctity'.

The 'sanctity' bestowed upon the poet is not a reaffirmation of ethical or religious norms but of a Nietzschean will; for the poem traverses 'Back beyond good and evil,' where both 'The Lord of Hosts and Devil | Are left on Eternity's level | Field'.<sup>697</sup> Combining Nietzsche's transvaluation and Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,' Lawrence's 'Paradise Re-entered' acknowledges a political scene from which they have been banished, yet charges and occupies that space through the Other's body. Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' also sought to fill the Manichean divide between good and evil with 'the return of Adam into Paradise,' who would wed physical desire with the divine.<sup>698</sup> Lawrence's poet, on the other hand, does not enter Paradise through vision but through the Other's body, which does not so much unite the worlds but invites a different one. Lawrence's sanctification of nakedness in Eden also paves the way for Duncan's 'Eden, the marriage before Heaven and Hell'.<sup>699</sup> Moreover, Lawrence's flaming body does not re-enter Paradise acceptingly when in touch, but must storm the gates in revolution:

But we storm the angel-guarded  
Gates of the long-discarded

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<sup>695</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 242.

<sup>696</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 242.

<sup>697</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 243.

<sup>698</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Boston: John W. Luce & Co., 1906), p. 6.

<sup>699</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 235.

Garden, which God has hoarded  
Against our pain.

The Lord of Hosts and the Devil  
Are left on Eternity's level  
Field, and as victors we travel  
To Eden home.

Back beyond good and evil  
Return we. Eve dishevel  
Your hair for the bliss-drenched revel  
On our primal loam. 700

When Duncan reads this poem, he is 'unsure' of Lawrence's rhyming of 'primal loam' with 'Eden home,'<sup>701</sup> but the pairing is critical, for it reassures the reader that the Other's body is the realm within which Eden can be re-entered. The dishevelment upon reclaiming such 'primal loam' also stresses a feral and ungodly occupation, yet through an existentialist pathos of regress, the poet and Eve stake out a new space upon a primordial ground, one which pre-dates any presiding Law.

'Paradise Re-Entered' is soon followed by a short series of poems which lead up to Duncan's 'immortal' poem, 'Elysium,' but the ascension to 'Elysium' first travels through 'Street Lamps,' *"She Said as Well to Me,"* and 'New Heaven and Earth'. The series is telling, as it is under 'Street Lamps' where 'the darknesses steep | Out all the sin,' and in *"She Said as Well to Me,"* the poet wrestles with the image of his own body through the perception of Eve and her hands. For 'She said to me: "What an instrument, your body!"' as 'It feels as if his [God] handgrasp, wearing you, | hollowed this groove in your sides, grasped you under the | breasts | and brought you to the very quick of your form,' but the

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<sup>700</sup> *Complete Poems*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>701</sup> *The Letters of Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov*, p. 258. Duncan's uncertainty is only in relation to his more preferred rhymes in the poem, what he called 'the innocence of simplistic rhymes' as found in the earlier stanza: 'We look back on the withering roses, | The stars, in their sun-dimmed closes, | Where 'twas given us to repose us | Sure on our sanctity'.



poet is ashamed, 'No tool, no instrument, no God!', as his body 'is all wistful and pathetic, like a monolith, | arrested, static'.<sup>702</sup> This poem, while not particularly intricate or widely read, is nevertheless part of the Edenic series, as its dialogic form, and its contention over the poet's lacking body, anticipates the subsequent poem, 'New Heaven and Earth'. 'New Heaven and Earth' is not listed as one of Duncan's 'immortal' poems, but the poem precedes 'Elysium' and ties together Duncan's readings. After Lawrence's poet storms the gates of Paradise, he must be welcomed by the Other before trespassing on the fleshly ground of 'New Heaven and Earth': 'And so I cross into another world | shyly and in homage linger for an invitation | from this unknown that I would trespass on'.<sup>703</sup> The 'invitation' which the poet waits for acknowledges that Eden's 'primal loam' is indeed the Other's body, and that Eden's gate creaks open with the Other's desire for the poet's body. When entering the new heaven on earth, the poet's identity experiences change, as his former selves suddenly appear as disgusting things which had only been able to render the world as ideal images of the self. Once on new territory, the poet looks back:

I was so weary of the world,  
 I was so sick of it,  
 everything was tainted with myself,  
 skies, trees, flowers, birds, water,  
 people, houses, streets, vehicles, machines,  
 nations, armies, war, peace-talking,  
 work, recreation, governing, anarchy,  
 it was all tainted with myself, I knew it all to start with  
 because it was all myself. <sup>704</sup>

From inside the gates of touch, the poet rebukes that egoic ideality which had projected its own origins: 'I looked at myself, the creator: | it was a maniacal horror in the end'.<sup>705</sup> The 'end' here marks a new beginning, one where the poet is being created in the other's

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<sup>702</sup> *Complete Poems*, pp. 255-256.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

<sup>704</sup> Ibid.

<sup>705</sup> Ibid, p. 257.

touch. When occupying the realm of touch, the poet finds itself not only suspended between its own body and the other's body, but between the death of his identity and the life of another: 'At last came death, sufficiency in death,' and 'I buried my beloved; it was good, I buried myself and was gone'.<sup>706</sup> Touch then is still destructive, as forms of an Adamic self and an Eve-like otherness are killed and buried. Such an identifiable liminality or sustained 'unknown' is held within touch:

now here was I, new-awakened, with my hand stretching  
out  
and touching the unknown, the real unknown, the un-  
known unknown.

[...]

I am the discoverer!

I have found the other world!

The unknown, the unknown!

I am thrown upon the shore.

I am covering myself with sand.

I am filling my mouth with the earth.

I am burrowing my body into the soil.

The unknown, the new world!

## VII

It was the flank of my wife

I touched with my hand, I clutched with my hand,

rising, new-awakened from the tomb! <sup>707</sup>

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<sup>706</sup> Ibid.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid, pp. 259-260.

Lawrence's poet clutches resurrection itself with his hand, grasping an 'unknown unknown'. And though the poet is 'the discoverer,' reaching out, he seems to have also lost a sense of agency, for it is the Other's body which has pulled him into 'the other world'.

Duncan's letter lists Lawrence's poems chronologically, and 'Elysium' arrives after 'New Heaven and Earth'. Like Emily Dickinson's 'Elysium,' where 'Felicity or doom' is brought by opening the door for a friend in the next room,<sup>708</sup> Lawrence's 'Elysium' begins from a place of 'loneliness,' in a walled-off antechamber between one's other-self and the other-Other: 'I have found a place of loneliness | Lonelier than Lyonesse, | Lovelier than Paradise'.<sup>709</sup> The poet's interstitial loneliness, however, is not exactly a position of masculinity facing an empty femininity, where the poet opens the door and grabs Eve's body. Rather, the lonely space which the poet occupies appears to be an embodiment of the female-Other who is touching and penetrating his body:

Invisible the hands of Eve  
Upon travelling to reeve  
Me from the matric, to relieve

Me from the rest! Ah, terribly  
Between the body of life and me  
Her hands slid in and set me free.

Ah, with a fearful, strange detection  
She found the source of my subjection  
To the All, and severed the connection.

Delivered helpless and amazed  
From the womb of the All, I am waiting, dazed  
For memory to be erased.

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<sup>708</sup> Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Raleigh: Hayes Barton Press, 2007), p. 1900.

<sup>709</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 261.

Then I shall know the Elysium  
That lies outside the monstrous womb  
Of time out of which I come.<sup>710</sup>

The poem gives off a strong sense of the maternal, as a sense of identity is born forth from the 'womb,' an experience that is 'terribly | Between the body of life and me,' but Lawrence's projection of maternal love and his disunion from that source is nevertheless held within the context of Frieda's hands. As in Duncan's *Adam's Way*, Adam has no identity except in his initial relation to his lover's maternal body, Erda, the womb-man who came before him: 'I know not who I am | I know now what I am | for I am this girl's lover | and am no more'.<sup>711</sup> It is this womb that Duncan's Adam was cut from, yet traces of Adam's identity are found when falling into the hands of Eve. In Lawrence's 'Elysium,' an 'Eve' lets the poet know 'that I was found' from a touch which separates him 'from the rest' of the matrix. It is Eve's touch, 'terribly | Between the body of life and me | Her hands slid in and set me free,' which renders the 'I' a transitory thing, since Edenic touch severs the 'I' from a Whitmanian 'All'. The poet now sees a body disconnected from its source, like a navel cut from the *umbilicus mundi*. Eve's penetrating touch, 'Her hands slid in and set me free,' opens up that other world for Lawrence's poet, and though that world is founded upon an external loam, 'Elysium' forms as an interior space where Edenic relations can play out.

Eve's 'invisible' hands introduce a pivotal yet ambivalent space, as the female Other is either putting her hands inside the poet's pants or inside the poet's naked body, which is not an unreasonable reading since Lawrence had approved of homosexual anal sex through 1917 and heterosexual anal sex after 1920.<sup>712</sup> But Lawrence is also insinuating that the other's hands are inside his very being, reviving a sense of becoming, as the 'I' is severed from the other self within his self, and from the pure Other, but also from his own body and the Other body inside his own. Catherine Malabou has questioned this very disarticulation of touch within Derrida, Deleuze and Damasio's deconstruction

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<sup>710</sup> *Complete Poems*, pp. 261-262.

<sup>711</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 212.

<sup>712</sup> Howard Booth, 'D.H. Lawrence and Male Homosexual Desire,' *The Review of English Studies*, 53:209 (Feb 2002), pp. 86-107 (104).

of affected senses of self. It was Kant who had posited an 'auto-affection,' wherein touch produces two forms of subjectivity – 'the transcendental form of apperception and the empirical form of the inner sense'; however, Derrida's *On Touching* argues that there is no 'pure' auto-affection, but a 'auto-hetero-affection,' wherein the sense of self is already an Other in me, who is touching me, and thus the 'I' and the 'me' who is being touched are further disarticulated from the Other who is in me and an Other who is touching me. Summarising Derrida's thesis, Malabou concludes: '[the] feeling of existence is thus never present to itself, but always disarticulated. It is not the feeling of my existence, but of the other's existence in me'.<sup>713</sup> The multiplied differences of otherness within touch disarticulate temporality as well as a pure relationality. Like the immortal touch of 'Elysium,' 'Her hands slid in and set me free' also captures Eve's inner-proximity at a greater distance, her connection as disconnection, and death as an immortalising movement wherein the poet's other-self and other-Other are each internal others cut from their affected source. It is this suspended realm of difference and disarticulation which radicalises the space within touch.

Lawrence's Edenic series captures and explores the realm of touch and the unfolding of the poet's identity therein, and it is Lawrence's poetics of male-female relations that teases out Duncan's own Edenic relations. *Adam's Way* and 'Narrative Bridges' illustrate the role of touch, as it is touch which opens Adam's 'pod' and introduces his relation to the body of Eve, from which he must re-create his identity. Lawrence had also centralised the severing of the *umbilicus mundi*, which is used to trace his embodiment of the Other yet without an absolute source to anchor him. Lawrence's Eden is also politicised, which is more evident in the Edenic form of Duncan's corresponding poems, 'Nights Scenes' and 'The Torso,' each of which are mostly known for strictly same-sex relations.

'Night Scenes' is a single poem that records Duncan's homosexual exploits, and though once considered a notorious poem,<sup>714</sup> it can also introduce the symbolisation of

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<sup>713</sup> Catherine Malabou, 'How Is Subjectivity Undergoing Deconstruction Today? Philosophy, Auto-Hetero-Affection, and neurobiological Emotion,' *Qui Parle*, 17:2 (Spring/Summer 2009), pp. 111-122 (114).

<sup>714</sup> 'Night Scenes' is known for its sexual imagery. Siobhán Scarry describes the poem as taking up 'the affective and material practices of gay male cruising, (see *Reading Duncan Reading*, 45).

sexual difference inherent to the political, queer space of Eden in 'The Torso'. First published in *The Floating Bear* in '62, when *Adam's Way* was performed, 'Night Scenes' was ultimately included in *Roots and Branches* in '64. The queer 'torso' in 'Night Scenes' is also a gateway to the barred space of Eden, which is the Church's courtyard in 'Night Scenes,' where male workers strike and rally. Since 'Night Scenes' was written from 1952 to 1964, the 'torso' of 'Night Scenes' can be read as looping back through Ginsberg's *Howl*, as *Howl* reads: 'who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried | their torsos night after night | with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls'.<sup>715</sup> The three sections of 'Night Scenes' were written at different stages. The first section was written in '52, the morning after a night-out in Berkeley, when Duncan slept with the twenty-three year old Classics student, Norman Austin. Lisa Jarrot finds Austin in the poem's stanza: 'youth spurts, at the lip the flower | lifts lifewards, at the | four o'clock in the morning, stumbling | into whose arms, at whose | mouth out of slumber sweetening'.<sup>716</sup> Siobhán Scarry, however, reads the poem as recalling Duncan's former sexual exploits in New York City, while section '3,' Scarry adds, concludes in Paris. In reading drafts of the poem, Scarry notes the references to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and translations from Breton's 'Pleine marge',<sup>717</sup> but 'Night Scenes' also seizes the eternal music that stems from the original 'chord' playing in the moonlight, which the poet touches in the poem: 'The moon climbs the scale of souls. | O, to release the first music somewhere again, | for a moment | to touch the design of the first melody!'.<sup>718</sup> The 'touch' of 'the first melody' continues a recurring motif from Duncan's debut collection *Heavenly City, Earthly City*, where Apollo's 'undying song' had transformed two homosexual lovers into 'smoky music,' and here it provides a segue into the coming cords of 'The Torso'.

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Duncan also considered the poem generally scandalous and somewhat of an embarrassment. Writing to Levertov in June, 1962, he wrote: "'Night Scenes' in *The Floating Bear* had caused a scandal and could not account for the poem's possibly being other than a botched job. And on two occasions, by George Stanley and again by a Lew Ellingham the poem had been read in ridicule, as evidence of my infatuation with my own habits and of my decline.' pp. 353.

<sup>715</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014), pp. 9.

<sup>716</sup> Robert Duncan, *The Ambassador from Venus: A Biography*, p. 185.

<sup>717</sup> Siobhán Scarry, 'Textual Poetics and the Politics of Reading in Duncan's 'Night Scenes,' in *Reading Duncan Reading*, ed. by Stephen Collis and Graham Lyons (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), p. 46.

<sup>718</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 104.

Part '2' of 'Night Scenes' introduces the poet's arrival into a Paradisal enclosure that touch will open. In this scene, the poet seems to be providing oral sex for another male-body, and when the poet's body is penetrated by the Other, the poet suddenly speaks of a 'we' who look down upon a previous 'I' and the two intertwining bodies, as in Lawrence. Here the poet rises from this embodied touch as the spirit of Ariel – the Shakespearean spirit whose sex is ambiguous. The poet initially senses that 'sweet Ariel-song' which 'the body hears | in the mother-tides of the first magic–', and just after 'youth spurts,' a new 'I' emerges from the poem's penetrated flesh, an I-spirit which looks down upon itself with the reader:

so that I know I am not I  
but a spirit of the hour descending into body  
whose tongue touches  
myrrh of the morgenrot

as in a cowslip's bell that is a moment comes Ariel  
to joy all round,  
but we see one lover take his lover in his mouth,  
leaping. Swift flame of  
abiding sweetness is in this flesh. <sup>719</sup>

Similar to the 'we' that had hung like 'smoky music' in 'I am a Most Fleshly Man,' Duncan's identity is suspended above his body, which exists as the Other's body that is inside him, 'in his mouth'. The mingling of 'who I am, who he is, where we are' is all inside the poet, metaphorically but also psychically and physically, since the lover's tongue, penis or semen is inside the poet's throat, not unlike Lawrence being penetrated by Eve. From this community of relations unfolding inside the poet, the poet's new 'I' sings as his throat is shaped in the form of the Other: 'this single up-fountain of a | single

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<sup>719</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

note around which | the throat shapes!<sup>720</sup> The sudden turn to Part '3' will then find this communal body protesting in Paradise.

Part '3' opens with the poet's jerking throat, his '*hoquète*,' a quote from Breton's '*Pleine marge*,' but Duncan's quotation will alter Breton's relation to woman (and Breton's Paris) by replacing it with a Paradisal courtyard of men's torsos in defiance. The first stanza of Part '3' reads:

*La lampe du coeur Breton qui file et bientôt*  
*hoquète à l'approach des parvis*  
smokes, raises a music out of the light, a lamp of notes  
that runs through the opening in Paradise  
into the meat from the dream the heart knows.<sup>721</sup>

Siobhán Scarry notes that Duncan's quotes '*Pleine marge*' but changes Breton's '*mon coeur*' to '*coeur Breton*,' which will also turn Breton's previous attention to 'women at odds with their time' in '*Pleine marge*' towards Duncan's relation to 'men's bodies,'<sup>722</sup> as Duncan's poem concludes: 'Out of André Breton | –these things translated from her savor into the savor of men's bodies | we return to her parvis'.<sup>723</sup> In Breton, his women 'arose towards me borne up by the mists of some chasm,' but, Scarry adds, Duncan sees 'Flashes' that 'seize the eye's grey' within the labouring men of the poem.<sup>724</sup> Scarry also argues that the homo-sexual substitution of Breton's Parsian women for Duncan's men is related to Duncan's wider dispute with the politics of Breton and French Surrealism. Duncan had called Breton and Nicolas Calas "'romantic revolutionaries' who 'rediscovered...revolution for the sheer sensation of it,' playing with 'the real political world...in charade to give excitement to the boredom of the rentiers'".<sup>725</sup> Scarry's thesis attempts to show the complexities of Duncan's literary derivations, which, like Duncan's poetics of structure, excessively appropriates pre-existing texts while resisting them. In

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<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>722</sup> *Reading Duncan Reading*, p. 62.

<sup>723</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 107.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid, p. 61.



'Night Scenes,' I argue, the poet turns the surrealist 'dream' which the 'heart knows' away from its romantic sense of revolution and grounds its politics in the Other's flesh, 'the meat',<sup>726</sup> but Duncan's queer form acknowledges the former position of woman's body in order to resist such relational structures.

'Night Scenes' is commonly referenced in criticism for biographical and historical context, since the poem documents several transitional stages in Duncan's life and poetry. The politics of sexual difference therein, however, continue to open up the Edenic site as a space for queer forms of resistance in Duncan's subsequent poetry. As the 'I' still hangs over in the outer-courtyard of Paradise, homo-sexual men protest with signs to reform patriarchal and phallic structures: 'figures of women passing through the strings of the harp of the sun, | fingers that flash chains we are signals | of protest, of assent, of longing, of anger'.<sup>727</sup> The protest is carried out by 'the torsos of men and trucks in their own light, steaming,' and their strike against these particular paradisaic 'gates' signifies an Edenic occupation no longer relying upon the 'breasts or loins' of 'the Queen of Byzantium,' nor upon 'her parvis'.<sup>728</sup> Rather, 'These grails | have men's arms and eyes, from which lamps like women fume | at the approach of the Outer Court, | half-naked the men mounting and dismounting'.<sup>729</sup> The invocation of the former structure of woman's body to man's continues to prepare for Duncan's homo-sexual substitutions, yet strictly 'homosexual' or narcissistic readings can be misleading here, for 'Night Scenes' stresses several features relative to sexual difference and Edenic touch. The first is that within this masculine defiance of the pre-existing Law, there is a revolt against Woman, the Empress of Byzantium, who symbolises the dominant structure of heteronormativity. This seemingly masculine form of protest therefore takes on a feminine position to confront the masculine discourse of the Empress. The poet watches this reversal, as the 'torsos of men' shine with 'lamps like women' upon the now cracked gates of a once guarded Paradise.

'The Torso' has a similar trajectory. Acting as the central poem for *Bending the Bow*, its title carries various denotations and connotations. 'The Torso' is found at the very midriff of the collection, providing a spine for the collection's running tropisms,

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<sup>726</sup> *The Collected Later Poems and Plays*, p. 106.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid, pp. 106-107. Also, the use of 'lamps' here is another reference to Breton's 'Pleine marge'.

motifs and movements, and yet it is most known as a singular poem. The poem's 'torso' also frames an original and eternal scene for Duncan, since focusing upon the 'torso' does not only connote what is grasped on the other's body during intercourse, but the torso is also the body's center. Like Jane Harrison or Derrida, Duncan reads the omphalic navel as the material trace of an origin from which we came but cannot know – the stone above Apollo's voice in the Temple in Delphi or the sign to an unknown womb. The umbilical 'chord' in 'The Torso' is also a pun for the collection's woven melody.

Criticism of 'The Torso' has often favored 'homosexual' readings, and even when considering the poem's issue with masculine language itself, conflicts of sexual difference have been overlooked. In 'Gender Muses and the Representations of Social Space in Robert Duncan's Poetry,' Anne Dewey reads 'The Torso' as 'domestic poetry of same-sex love, the unity of body' which 'exemplifies the growth of imaginative self-knowledge and meaning from the erotic bond with a similar other'.<sup>730</sup> But the poem's Edenic context will render the 'domestic' more foreign and its 'same-sex' and 'unity of body' more conflicted in its references to gender oppositions, ruptured temporalities, and severed identities, albeit in touch. The 'nonviolating touch' that Dewey describes, which 'renders each body intelligible as an organic unity,' emphasises the non-dualistic relationship yet downplays the very violence that touch brings upon one's sense of self and to the symbolic structures Duncan is at once beholden to and resisting. Greg Hewett's reading of 'The Torso,' on the other hand, does confront the problem of symbolic representation and sees Duncan as exemplifying Kristeva's *chora*, where the poet renders himself a not-yet master of language, a victimised 'subject in language'.<sup>731</sup> Hewett writes, '[The Torso] is a proposition for a new masculinity and male sexuality that is more than a simple identity, or simply the abject death of all identity, but part of a powerful, transformative process in language'.<sup>732</sup> Hewett's reading focuses on the semiotic chora and resists readings of sexual difference, citing Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence* to maneuver past the topic, since Dollimore had contrasted semiotic difference to that of

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<sup>730</sup> Anne Dewey, 'Gender Muses and the Representations of Social Space in Robert Duncan's Poetry,' *Contemporary Literature*, 50:2 (Summer 2009), pp. 299-331 (308).

<sup>731</sup> Greg Hewett, 'Revealing 'The Torso': Robert Duncan and the Process of Signifying Male Homosexuality,' *Contemporary Literature*, 35:3 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 522-546 (523).

<sup>732</sup> Ibid.

The attenuation and resistance of language's authority in 'The Torso' is expressed through the poem's form, and not just in its linguistic questioning of language, as in Hewett's example of the poem questioning the term '*homosexual?*' Without form, language is a compromised medium when questioning language, and 'The Torso' certainly leans on form. To give an overall sense of the poem's hieroglyphic form, I first quote the poem in full:

<sup>733</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 329.

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quickening a fire in me,    a trembling  
 hieroglyph:            At the root of the neck  
*the clavicle*, for the neck is the stem of the great artery  
 upward into his head that is beautiful  
  
 At the rise of the pectoral muscles  
*the nipples*, for the breast are like sleeping fountains  
 of feeling in man, waiting above the beat of his heart,  
 shielding the rise and fall of his breath, to be  
 awakend  
  
 At the axis of his mid hriff  
*the navel*, for in the pit of his stomach the chord from  
 which first he was fed has its temple  
  
 At the root of the groin  
*the pubic hair*, for the torso is the stem in which the man  
 flowers forth and leads to the stamen of flesh in which  
 his seed rises  
  
 a wave of need and desire over    taking me  
    cried out my name  
 (This was long ago.    It was another life)  
    and said,  
 What do you want of me?  
 I do not know, I said.    I have fallen in love.    He  
    has brought me into heights and depths my heart  
    would fear    without him.    His look  
    pierces my side    •    fire eyes    •  
 I have been waiting for you, he said:  
    I know what you desire  
    you do not yet know    but through me    •  
 And I am with you everywhere.            I have raised myself  
    from darkness in your rising  
    wherever you are  
    my hand in your hand    seeking    the locks, the keys  
 I am there.    Gathering me, you gather  
    your Self    •  
 For my Other is not a woman but a man

The swaying form of 'The Torso' seems to stand with an organic contour, and its indentations and italicisation map their own meanings. For example, the italicised words on the left-side of the poem slide down the poem's male body, from '*clavicle*,' '*nipples*,' '*navel*,' '*pubic hair*,' to the '*bosom*' of the '*King*'. The fragmented form is explicitly introduced as a 'trembling | hieroglyph' which the 'torso' is meant to signify. Such a physical form solicits the reader's handling and navel gazing, as a perception of the Other's torso presents a trace of one's origin:

At the axis of his mid hriff  
*the navel*, for in the pit of his stomach the chord from  
which first he was fed has its temple

At the root of the groin

The non-verbal and spatial form of 'The Torso' restructures language with material omissions, starkly presented by the poem's dispersed interpuncts alone ('•'), which, Duncan introduces in the '*Preface*,' interrupt and slow down the lyrical cadence of the poem. The poem's ellipses also weave together the poem's non-linguistic, hieroglyphic structure, acting as marks upon a skin that question the sexual difference of their asymmetry: 'Is he. . . [...] . . . *homosexual*?' The trembling bodily form thus symbolises a 'Truth' that is in 'man's image,' yet the relation to 'man' is an 'illusion' called into question.

In 'The Torso,' the desire to be embraced in 'thine arms' is the '*sight*' of an 'Elysium,' a remodeled version of Lawrence's 'Elysium,' set in the grip of the other's fleshly gates. Entering the gates is a political act, and Duncan's italicised lines, '*So thou wouldst smile, and take me in thine arms | The sight of London to my exiled eyes | Is as Elysium a new-come soul*,' are taken from Marlowe's *Edward II*, building upon Edward's resistance to established politics through Edward's preference for poetry and his male-

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<sup>735</sup> *Bending the Bow*, pp. 63-65.

lover Gaveston, over and against Edward's wife.<sup>736</sup> Like Lawrence's 'Elysium,' where 'Her hands slid in and set me free,' Duncan's '*Elysium*' finds 'His hands unlocking from chambers of my male body,' where 'I thought a Being more than vast, His body leading | into Paradise, his eyes | quickening a fire in me'. The flowering orgasm that Lawrence's night scenes had captured as Paradisal is echoed in the climactic stanza following the 'mid hriff' or 'navel' in 'The Torso': '*the pubic hair*, for the torso is the stem in which the man | flowers forth and leads to the stamen of flesh in which | his seed rises'. Duncan's '*Preface*' to *Bending the Bow* had introduced the importance of his marginal spacing and here Duncan aligns 'At the axis of his mid hriff' with 'At the root of the groin,' and aligns '*the navel*' with '*the pubic hair*,' rendering a gate where touch is rooted to the lost origin of sexuality, but the gates are entered not through a hole but by holding the torso.

More importantly, the *navel* and rising seed of the torso construct a new Elysium when the body is perceived in sexual difference. It is the Other in the poem who approaches and identifies the poet, through the Other's own desire, yet the poet's object of desire exists in the questioning of the Other, a desire and flesh that the poet holds onto. First addressing his lover with a Lacanian *che vuoi?*,<sup>737</sup> the poet is beckoned to enter the Other, or vice versa:

What do you want of me?

I do not know, I said. I have fallen in love

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<sup>736</sup> 'Revealing 'The Torso': Robert Duncan and the Process of Signifying Male Homosexuality,' p. 537.

<sup>737</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectics of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,' *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981). Lacan's phrase, '*che vuoi?*', can be translated as 'What do you want?' For Lacan, the subject is in the position of the Other's desire, and thus subjectivisation or structuration of the subject is caused by the subject's imaginary questioning of what the Other desires. Lacan states: 'man's desire is the Other's desire, in which the *de /of/* provides what grammarians call a 'subjective determination' – namely, that it is qua /as/ Other that man desires. [...] This is why the Other's question – that comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply – which takes some such form as '*Che vuoi?*', 'What do you want?' is the question that best leads the subject to the path of his own desire'.

[...]

I have been waiting for you, he said:

I know what you desire

you do not yet know                      but through me •

The poet's object of desire is doing the questioning for the poet, 'What do you want of me?', the Other asks. As the Other takes over in speaking, the form of the poet/poem reverses its positioning, and judging by the 'And' which follows 'but through me •,' the reader can assume that it is the Other who continues to speak throughout the stanza, as the 'I' remains the 'I' from the Other's position. From this angle, the closing lines further complicate the poet's own sexual identity, for the conclusion appeals to an asymmetrical (sexual) difference, 'my Other is not a woman'. This non-woman 'Other' is the poet, since it is the poet's Other which speaks. However, here the poet's desire is projecting what its Other is asking of him, and thus what is speaking is the poet's desire of the Other's desire, in which the poet finds himself taking the place of 'woman'. More interestingly still, the internalisation of the poet's Other and the reversibility of the Other's position is grounded in touch:

wherever you are

my hand in your hand                      seeking                      the locks, the keys

I am there.                      gathering me, you gather

your Self •

For my Other is not a woman but a man

*the King upon whose bosom let me lie.*

The obscurity here has a resting assurance, that is, if the reader can answer the question – what is the body or 'bosom' that emerges? Since the poem leads the reader to perceive that it is the poet's desire for the Other which is speaking back to the poet, perhaps we may interpret *'the King upon whose bosom let me lie'* as the poet's bosom, the Other's other. This *'King'* is not necessarily reducible to a body in and of itself, for it is a 'who' in possession of a body: *'whose bosom let me lie.'* In other words, the body of the poet's male Other is an internalised Other, an internal Other who rests upon the form of the poet.<sup>738</sup> If, in this rhetorical inscription, the poet's Other is being projected and laid out in the written form of the poem, then perhaps we may be able to read the body of the Other as that which rests upon the poet's page, the poet's bosom, or the bodily form of touch.

The poem's embodied touch provokes an additional question, what is the body's relation to sexual difference? In Judith Butler's study of Irigaray's writing on Merleau-Ponty's chiasm, Butler uses Irigaray's own language and excessive 'citationality' of Merleau-Ponty to re-define and re-locate sexual difference within the bodily perception of touch. When defining her terms, Butler asks whether the relationality of 'sexual difference' is equivalent to other 'ethical relations,' and Butler points in the affirmative to a mutual dependence upon the symbolic. Ethical relations presume a symmetry between the subject and its other, and, in rendering such symmetries as a universality, a masculine discourse dominates: claiming that its symbolic order can represent the world, but only by disavowing the differences still unknown. Masculinity is a language which appropriates and erases the asymmetrical relationality that it is founded upon. In summarising Irigaray while critiquing her, Butler writes, 'this rupture or unassimilable difference that calls into question this universalizing movement is what constitutes the feminine in language; it exists, as it were, as a rupturing of the universal or what might be understood as a protest within the universal, the internal dissent of the feminine'.<sup>739</sup> By defining sexual difference as a bodily relation to an Other, wherein linguistic or semantic forms cannot appropriate the asymmetry of touch, Butler asks whether or not sexual

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<sup>738</sup> Keeping in mind Duncan's occultist and Kabbalistic tradition, the King's bosom also invokes God and his kingdom, or, in Duncan's vein, the bosom of the material kingdom of Malkuth, the Kabbalistic sephiroth which does not emanate from the Creator directly, but is the material and earthlike substance upon which the Other lies.

<sup>739</sup> *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, p. 153.



difference can also operate within same-sex relations, and of course her answer is 'yes'.<sup>740</sup> Within Duncan's 'The Torso,' the stipulation that 'For my Other is not a woman but a man | *the King upon whose bosom let me lie,*' is already a citing of 'woman' in order to position 'man' through an act of deferral and *différance*. However, since it is not the poet desiring his Other in the position of a woman, but rather the poet envisioning his Other desiring his own self in the position of woman, the poem is thus an extension of a feminine body to its masculine Other. Hewett had acknowledged that the poem's line, 'gathering me, you gather | your Self,' derives from the Gospel of Eve, where it is written, 'And from wherever thou wilt thou gatherest me; but in gathering me thou gatherest thyself,'<sup>741</sup> and though it may propound the citationality and *différance* so critical for Duncan's poetics, the reader is put in a textual space where a new Paradise and Elysium will be entered, one structured by Edenic relationalities, but wherein the Other's desire speaks from the poet's feminine but manly flesh. The poem's form thus sustains a relational asymmetry to language and its others, which is perhaps most explicitly observed in the poem's symbolic reversibility of sexual difference, as opened up through the torso.

In restructuring the feminine within male homosexuality, it is perhaps opportune to read the poem's bodily form as lying in the poem's spacing. In the closing stanza, the length of the spatial interruptions consistently break and slow the linguistic phrasing, but it also captures the interlocking of hands, which the poem itself grasps:

wherever you are

my hand in your hand            seeking            the locks, the keys

The space is weaving and holding the male-Other, rendering the bodily form a poetic subjectile,<sup>742</sup> both materially gripping and supporting the very fleshly language of the

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<sup>740</sup> Ibid, p. 159.

<sup>741</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity. 2nd Edition* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), p. 160.

<sup>742</sup> Jacques Derrida and Paule Thévenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998). The word 'subjectile' refers to the surface beneath paint; a term found sparingly but known from Antonin Artaud's usages, which are commented on by Derrida. Derrida sees the subjectile as a painted surface which is both the subject and object, providing both ground and

Other. In overlooking the sexual difference inherent to the poem and to the Edenic series 'The Torso' is woven into, it may be difficult to take the conflicted form of the poem, and its feminine space, as a bodily form. Lawrence's Edenic poetry certainly solicits and informs such a reading. In Duncan's 'The Torso,' however, unlike in Lawrence, the hieroglyph beckons the reader to read the poem's physical space. In gazing into the navel of 'The Torso,' and holding its bodily form, the reader stands before the gates of a queer Eden being occupied.

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support. 'Subjectile, the word or the thing, can take the place of the subject or of the object – being neither one nor the other.'

## Chapter III

### **'between those black lines of print': The Polarised Body in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar***

'an equalization of | hazards | bringing the poet | back to  
song | as before | to sing of death | as before | and life'

~Denise Levertov, 'Three Meditations'

*Vive le roi; le roi est mort, vive le roi.*

~ Plath's *Journal*

Until they are wrapped up in that shroud and both father and subject are carried away into the solitude of mutism, depressed persons do not forget how to use signs. They keep them, but the signs seem absurd, delayed, ready to be extinguished, because of the splitting that affects them.

~Kristeva, *Black Sun*

## Mourning Plath's Lawrence

In Diane Middlebrook's joint biography of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, entitled *Her Husband*, Middlebrook acknowledges a reception of D.H. Lawrence that is not commonly favored in Plath criticism. 'It is difficult,' writes Middlebrook, 'to make Lawrence the champion of a woman as ambitious as Plath was ambitious. Plath found a way'.<sup>743</sup> In criticism, Hughes's admiration for Lawrence has no doubt shadowed Plath's own appropriations, yet Middlebrook admits Lawrence is intimately held by Plath before and after her relationship with Hughes. Middlebrook occasionally mentions that Lawrence's work appears formative for Plath's 'erotic ideology,'<sup>744</sup> as early as her undergraduate years, which is an impression, Middlebrook adds, that becomes more apparent when juxtaposing Lawrence's *Women in Love* with Plath's novel *The Bell Jar*.<sup>745</sup> First noting Plath's early attachment to Lawrence's concept of 'polarisation' in *Women in Love* – a theory which proposed that a woman may still maintain independence when in a heterosexual relationship, Middlebrook notices similar tropes in *Women in Love* and *The Bell Jar*, ultimately raising the still unaddressed question, 'What if *Women in Love* could be updated, to replace Lawrence's heroine Ursula Brangwen with someone like Sylvia Plath?'<sup>746</sup> Middlebrook's biographical inquiry here should perhaps be rephrased by replacing Ursula with Plath's own protagonist from *The Bell Jar*, Esther. In either case, Middlebrook is not able to take up such a specific question or literary analysis in her joint biography, and the question remains unthought. A comparison between Ursula and Esther, however, repositions Plath's relation to Lawrence, in that while Plath's poetry must speak through Lawrence's tropes and his sometimes masculine discourse, the novelistic form of *Women in Love* and *The Bell Jar* each portray a feminine body that resists being inscribed into paternal structures, which is a struggle that constructs the novelistic form itself.

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<sup>743</sup> Diane Middlebrook, *Her Husband: Hughes and Plath—A Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2003), p. 42.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

Criticism has long studied how Plath's late-poetry reissues certain masculine tropes, provided by Hughes and Lawrence alike, representing Plath's lyrical and feminist poetics. Such an analysis of Plath's poetic discourse should also include a study of Plath's embrace of the body in Lawrence. The female body which Lawrence and Plath seem to share does appear rather melancholic in comparison to her lyrical appropriations. A threatened female body is certainly prevalent in both Plath and Lawrence. In the case of each author, the shadow of war only increased such threats. Cold War politics bore heavily upon Plath's late work,<sup>747</sup> famously captured by Esther's fear of female domesticity during 'the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs,'<sup>748</sup> and Mark Kinkead-Weekes had stated, 'the most important point about *Women in Love* is that it is a war novel,'<sup>749</sup> aptly characterised by Birkin's aggressive apocalyptic philosophy. But both novels primarily explore the sense of a female body from its adverse relation to patriarchal society, which includes a repulsion away from dominant discourses usually spoken by men. Esther's sexual attraction for men is matched by her aversion to marriage and withdrawal from Buddy Willard's letters. Such gestures are comparable to the sisters in *Women in Love*, as Gudrun escapes the strangle-hold of Gerald while Ursula ultimately submits to wedding Birkin despite continually cringing at his ongoing pontifications. Ursula's experience of 'polarisation' will not only address the dueling affects of her desires but the struggle of the novel's form itself, not unlike Esther's own trappings in *The Bell Jar*. Though Birkin will define 'polarisation' through the imagery of twin stars, joined and yet separate, Ursula considers such a proposition as but an extension of Birkin's overbearing discourse, and yet she upholds a relationship to Birkin through her fidelity to the very sensation of her agitated body. Similarly, when pondering over her recently discovered lust, Plath observed 'the inevitable magnetic polar forces' between a 'body upon body,' yet she also recognised that such a force implies the 'mutual necessary destruction' of her 'identity,' a consequence of being absorbed into domesticity or

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<sup>747</sup> Robin Peel, *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics* (London: Associated University Press, 2002). Also see Robin Peel, 'Body, Word, and Photograph: Sylvia Plath's Cold War Collage and the Thalidomide Scandal', *Journal of American Studies*, 40 (2006), 71-95 (1).

<sup>748</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 1.

<sup>749</sup> Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'Introduction,' in *Women in Love* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. xv.

patriarchal structures.<sup>750</sup> Plath concluded that the 'hunger burn[ing] in breasts and secret fluid in vagina' is also 'driving blindly for destruction,' 'a sign that he must compete and master me—symbolic, what?'<sup>751</sup> Instead of choosing one experience over another – to form a relationship with a paternal figure or not – Plath imagines 'a polarization rather – a balance of two integrities, changing, electrically, one with the other, yet with centers of coolness, like stars. || (And D.H. Lawrence did have something after all–)'.<sup>752</sup> Lawrence's concept of polarisation is helpful here, for it establishes itself on the invisible forces felt upon a female body that is being pulled and pushed. Such a body is solicited from *Women in Love's* excessive dialogic form, and a comparable polarised body appears embedded within the very form of *The Bell Jar*.

Both Lawrence and Plath will tease out the polarisation of a young woman's sexual desire for men, which also fears subordination, and they do so by bringing the very sensation of a resistant female body into the form of the novel. Noticing that Lawrence's 'polarisation' is not necessarily a defined concept but rather a process under which the novel's discursive narrative is itself struggling, Michael Bell writes, 'Far from being naturalised as the given structure of their relationship, the image [of polarisation] is introduced as a speculative and highly problematic possibility,' one that 'pervades the novel as a whole,' hence, 'this is the novel in which the thematising of language begins to focus on limitation and difficulty'.<sup>753</sup> Gudrun and Gerald's sexual aggression towards the 'rabbit' in *Women in Love*, Birkin's 'demonic' language, and the sexual vulgarity of Lawrence's 'fig' imagery, are also tropes found in Plath's work, similarly exuding a torn feminine flesh when encountering masculine violence. In *The Bell Jar*, for example, Esther continually associates 'figs' as sensuous symbols of social status and sexual desire, and yet Esther insists on remaining within the 'crotch of the fig tree,' an affected space which resists the desired figs. Moreover, Esther's recurring attempts to submerge herself within crawl spaces instead of facing the structures which such figs represent (whether marriage, motherhood, sex, a job, or writing), is a maneuver that introduces Esther's

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<sup>750</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Unabridged Journal* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), pp. 104-107.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

<sup>752</sup> Ibid.

<sup>753</sup> Michael Bell, *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 97.

proclivity for returning to the sense of a bodily womb, shielding her from the externalised desires she finds threatening. Esther repeatedly retreats into her 'hot bath' or the 'cocoon' of her bed sheets, just as her body embeds itself in and from the language it engages with: Esther 'crawled between the mattress' to let the book pages 'fan slowly by my eyes' when giving-up on writing, and she would 'crawl in between those black lines of print' when reading, or become a 'virgin sheet' rolled up in a typewriter, finally unable to write letters at all. Such acts and imagery will continue to show a polarised feminine body, resistant to the language it simultaneously desires to produce, as an integral component to the novel's unfolding form. By exploring Plath's own readings of Lawrence, and by comparing their shared tropisms, Lawrence's texts will appear more intimate and intimated in Plath (and less Hughesian), for in each author there is a feminine body that can be sensed in its resistance to the text in which it forms.

When discussing Plath's relation to Lawrence, her affinity should first be introduced as something other than a product of her relationship with Hughes, for Plath can be seen cherishing Lawrence throughout her literary life. Connie Ann Kirk's *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* only mentions Lawrence twice when noting a general influence behind certain poems by Hughes, which Plath admired,<sup>754</sup> and Jon Rosenblatt's *The Poetry of Initiation* names Lawrence twice in passing, when referring to Plath's interest in unconscious forces and the 'ritual processes' of 'death-and-rebirth'.<sup>755</sup> However, Plath had first read Lawrence in high school during her three years under Wilberly Crockett,<sup>756</sup> and was therefore quite content when moving into Lawrence House at Smith College in 1950. That year Plath read Lawrence's prose and poetry and found his orgasmic poem 'Tortoise Shout' and the matter of sex to be 'monumental topics of interest'.<sup>757</sup> In her sophomore year Plath turned to Lawrence and Freud's understanding of sexuality,<sup>758</sup> and by junior year she had immersed herself in *Women in Love*.<sup>759</sup> In 1956, while preparing for exams at Newnham College, Cambridge, Plath wrote to her mother, 'for D.H. Lawrence[,] I had

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<sup>754</sup> Connie Ann Kirk, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 71-72.

<sup>755</sup> Jon Rosenblatt, *The Poetry of Initiation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 21, 46.

<sup>756</sup> Linda Wagner-Martin, *Sylvia Plath: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 43.

<sup>757</sup> *D.H. Lawrence and Nine Women*, p. 113.

<sup>758</sup> *Her Husband*, p. 41.

<sup>759</sup> *D.H. Lawrence and Nine Women*, p. 113; *Unabridged Journal*, p. 105.

read most of the novels and memorized passages on moral theory only to be forbidden to speak of his novels'.<sup>760</sup> Due to the sexual content of Lawrence's fiction and Plath's interest, she was only allowed to reference biographies of Lawrence or his non-fiction, so Plath rebelled and wrote on *The Man Who Died* for her exam anyways.<sup>761</sup> Plath also studied Lawrence under Dr. Dorothea Krook at Cambridge, during which time Plath had dreams wherein the Christ and Isis of Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* were replaced by herself and Richard Sassoon,<sup>762</sup> the boy she kept at a distance for so long. When returning to teach at Smith College in 1957, Plath energetically taught Lawrence but was reluctant to share him, writing to her mother, 'I don't like talking about D.H. Lawrence and about critics' views of him. [...] I like reading him selfishly for an influence on my own life and my own writing'.<sup>763</sup>

Plath's readings of female desire in Lawrence were conditioned and carried out as a private affair, internalising Lawrence while employing him as a literal device. In 1958 Plath began rereading *Lady Chatterley's Lover* at a cafe, 'drawn back again with the joy of a woman living with her own gamekeeper',<sup>764</sup> and imagining herself within Lawrence's extended fiction:

*Women in Love* and *Sons and Lovers*. Love, love: Why do I feel I would have known and loved Lawrence. How many women must feel this and be wrong! I opened *The Rainbow*, which I have never read, and was sucked into the concluding Ursula and Skrebensky episode and sank back, breath knocked out of me, as I read of their London hotel, their Paris trip, their riverside loving while Ursula studied at college. This is the stuff of my life – my life, different, but no less brilliant and splendid.<sup>765</sup>

The following year, in 1959, Plath moved back to England and attended The Obscenity Trial of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, where she recorded the daily events and testimonies in

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<sup>760</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 315.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> *Unabridged Journal*, p. 229.

<sup>763</sup> *Letters Home*, p. 330.

<sup>764</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (New York: The Dial Press, 1982), p. 196.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.



her journal.<sup>766</sup> Plath's marriage to Ted Hughes in '56 had only added another layer to Plath's readings of Lawrence, since Hughes privileged Lawrence's idyllic imagery when composing his own, as in *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960), which trickles into the pastoral in Plath's *The Colossus* (1960). Upon signing the publication contract for *The Colossus and Other Poems* in 1960, Hughes celebrated by giving Plath the two-volume set of Lawrence's *Collected Poems*, and that same year they named their daughter Frieda. Although Plath told her mother that the baby's name came from Aunt Frieda, Hughes had told Al Alvarez that she was named after Lawrence's wife (Alvarez was married to Frieda Lawrence's granddaughter). But as Plath's and Hughes's relationship grew dark, so too did the nature of their Lawrentian poetics, as witnessed in their competing poems with the same title, 'The Rabbit Catcher' (1962), where they appeal to Lawrence's 'Rabbit Snared in the Night,' discussed later. When turning to her novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) after their separation, Plath sought a 'master' to emulate, and first thought of Lawrence and *Women in Love*.<sup>767</sup> In those final years, before her ultimate suicide, Hughes had noticed Plath undertaking a new reading list, which included 'the Bible, D.H. Lawrence (mainly rereading), novels by Patrick White and some biographies and general nonfiction, and "several contemporary English novels – mostly by women and quite a few American ones"'.<sup>768</sup> When considering Plath's long-developed relation to Lawrence, her return to Lawrence's work in those final years may speak to her combative use of Lawrence when targeting Hughes, but her return to Lawrence also characterises the insulated readings which were always her own.

Christina Britzolakis's *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* is observant of Plath's allusions to Lawrence, but the *Theatre of Mourning* will move on from readings of the body in Plath or Lawrence and focus more on linguistic performance. Britzolakis introduces her work as spinning off of Jacqueline Rose's *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, as both scholars replace biographical readings of Plath's 'confessional' poetry with readings of the haunted subject upon the surface of Plath's writing. Rose and Britzolakis do so in order to trace a resistant female subject that lives on even while patriarchal discourse still enframes it. The 'theatre of mourning' is a 'struggle with the ghost of the other, an attempt

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<sup>766</sup> *Unabridged Journal*, p. 595.

<sup>767</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 156.

<sup>768</sup> *Her Husband*, pp. 198-199.

to demarcate the dead from the living,' writes Britzolakis,<sup>769</sup> and Rose's opening statement, 'Plath haunts our culture,'<sup>770</sup> is more specifically testifying to how Plath's writing or 'Archive' appears haunted by the masculine dominance of Hughes, Cold War politics, and female domesticity. Rose begins by introducing Hughes's strong-handedness when he edited her own work on Plath's archive: 'In correspondence with the Hughes's, this book was called "evil" [...] I was asked to remove my reading of 'The Rabbit Catcher,' and when I refused, I was told by Ted Hughes that my analysis would be damaging for Plath's (now adult) children and that speculation of the kind I was seen as engaging in about Sylvia Plath's sexual identity would in some countries be 'grounds for homicide'".<sup>771</sup> Rose will apply Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and its notion of 'abjection'<sup>772</sup> to express how Plath's writing appeals to the maternal body when shocked by the master's words, yet Plath's writing must come to terms in order to work through language, producing a writing style portrayed as 'neither marshalled nor fragmented, neither surplus order nor a hysterical body pouring out of itself'.<sup>773</sup> In defining Kristeva's abjection in the context of Plath's style, Rose writes, 'The body appears at the origin of language,' in that dreadful exit from the mother's womb, 'not as idealisation, therefore, but as that which places both the subject and language most fundamentally at risk. Abjection belongs at the boundary of language, vanishing point and point of emergence for the subject, and it reappears when a threatened loss of meaning carnalises itself as an object which pulls and threatens from the outside'.<sup>774</sup> By concerning herself with Kristeva's psychoanalytic work on abjection, Rose analyses forms of writing which remain on the borders of language yet upon its surface, a form that produces without being healed, and, by doing so, Rose avoids stereotypical readings of trauma in Plath and reveals 'a psychic economy of

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<sup>769</sup> Christina Britzolakis, *Sylvia Plath and the Theatre of Mourning* (London: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>770</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>771</sup> Ibid, xiii. In 1973, Marjorie Perloff had already documented Ted Hughes's contemptible editing of Plath's last three poetry collections—*Ariel* (1963), *Crossing the Water* (1971) and *Winter Trees* (1971), as a significant number of the poems appear arbitrarily dated, misdated, and collected in themes perhaps suitable for the editor's image.<sup>771</sup> Again, Hughes's chronological ordering of Plath's *Collected Poems* inaccurately dates some of her poems as well, for perhaps similar reasons.

<sup>772</sup> *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, pp. 18, 25, 33-35, 38-39, 52, 57, 240, 243, 244, 245, 257.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-34.

writing—that is, the unconscious and normally covered-over conditions or substrata of speech'.<sup>775</sup> Britzolakis follows Rose as well as Kristeva, and though Rose only refers to Lawrence twice parenthetically, Britzolakis will use Lawrence as a recurring example of how Plath will psychically reperform masculine discourse in order to produce a work of mourning.

In Plath's poetry, Britzolakis reads a 'self-reflectivity' within Plath's rhetorical performances of fantasy, rendering a poetic that does not inscribe the female poet into its masculine discourse but works through such 'figurative language' in 'allegorical' redramatization.<sup>776</sup> 'The work of mourning,' states Britzolakis, 'does not belong to the author but inhabits the space of the text'.<sup>777</sup> As Steven Gould Axelrod's *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* had argued that Plath's 'sense of contingency, marginality and loss' enabled her to transform 'muteness' into a 'textual 'voice',<sup>778</sup> so too does Britzolakis show how Plath's 'theatre of mourning' can work through patriarchal discourse, including Lawrence's. For example, Plath's recurrent trope of blood in *Ariel*, in poems such as 'Medusa,' 'Cut' and 'Kindness,' is a metaphorical use of blood that stresses 'a splitting or doubling of subjectivity, a primal "cut,"'<sup>779</sup> which is in contrast to the 'phallic blood-brotherhood' in Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 'one of Plath's sacred texts,' writes Britzolakis.<sup>780</sup> In *Studies*, Lawrence blames 'Eve's transgression' for the West's 'mind-body dualism,' continues Britzolakis, and he 'looked forward to a time when women would "choose to experience that great submission"'.<sup>781</sup> Britzolakis reads the cut thumb in Plath's poem 'Cut' as a 'phallic "homunculus" (a Lawrentian word) and a metonym for the "castrated" female body,' and thus Plath is seen twisting the 'mock-heroic images of male aggression, conflict, and conquest' by allowing 'the speaker to turn her own hurt to rhetorical profit, through the agency of an ironic self-reflection'.<sup>782</sup> When conveying Plath's 'Poetics of Sacrifice,' Britzolakis turns to

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<sup>775</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>776</sup> *Sylvia Plath and The Theatre of Mourning*, p. 7.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>778</sup> Steven Gould Axelrod, *Sylvia Plath: The Wound and the Cure of Words* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1992), p. 4.

<sup>779</sup> *Sylvia Plath and The Theatre of Mourning*, p. 171.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid, p. 169.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid, pp. 171-172.

Lawrence's 'melodramatic scenario' of the 'heroine submitting to a primeval male' in such tales as 'Sun,' 'The Woman Who Rode Away' and *The Plumed Serpent*, from which Lawrence's 'themes of sexuality, violence, and power struggle are central to Plath's creative dialogue with Ted Hughes'.<sup>783</sup> In the poems between 1956-1957, as in 'Ode for Ted,' 'Bucolics' and 'The Queen's Complaint,' Plath speaks to the 'hierarchical world' of Hughes's Dionysian sexual violence and his sense of an emasculated modern culture, which Hughes adopted from Lawrence and employed in his own poetry at that time, within *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*.<sup>784</sup> But Britzolakis looks to Plath's later 1962 poem, 'Poppies in July,' where 'this masochistic femininity is parodied'.<sup>785</sup> The poem's internalised violence, 'A mouth just bloodied. | Little bloody skirts,'<sup>786</sup> parodies and thus critiques Lawrence's 'celebration of husband tyranny,' argues Britzolakis.<sup>787</sup> Britzolakis's implicit focus upon such poems as 'Daddy,' 'Ocean 1212-W,' 'Moon Under the Yew Tree,' 'Elm,' 'A Rabbit Catcher,' 'Cut' and 'Lady Lazarus' accurately show and yet depend upon the rebirth underlining the late *Ariel* collection. 'Lady Lazarus,' for example, bites straight down to the bone as Plath brags about her skill in dying, for 'Out of the ash | I rise with my red hair | And I eat men like air'.<sup>788</sup> But Plath's poetic work of mourning, through and against Lawrence, muddles Plath's more melancholic prose in *The Bell Jar* or in Plath's earlier poetry (e.g. *The Colossus*). With a scope limited to Plath's late poetry, Plath's lyrical aggression upon the aggressor's discourse can be emphasised, while the correspondence between the feminine body in Plath and that in Lawrence may speak differently under a different lens, genre, or poem.

### **The Voiceless Cries of Rabbit and Child**

Rose and Britzolakis both refer to Plath's 'A Rabbit Catcher' when contextualising Plath's feminist critique of Hughes's own poem with the same title, and Lawrence's mediating role in this exchange remains obscure yet symptomatic. When taking Plath's 'A

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<sup>783</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>785</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>786</sup> *Ariel*, p. 82.

<sup>787</sup> *Sylvia Plath and The Theatre of Mourning*, p. 81.

<sup>788</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 19.

Rabbit Catcher' for a section of her book, Rose parenthetically cites the comparison Marjorie Perloff made between Plath's poem and Lawrence's 'Love on a Farm,' but this comparative note does not call the poem's allusions into question.<sup>789</sup> Britzolakis, on the other hand, mentions the poem's Lawrentian origin but only in passing, and only to implicitly conflate Lawrence with Hughes, where a 'ghostly' influence and 'overwhelming invasion of otherness' ambiguously implicates both men.<sup>790</sup> Plath's version of the poem would imagine a male gamekeeper anticipating his catch with sexual arousal, projecting Hughes as the violent trapper. 'It was the place of force—,' she wrote, and as 'The paths narrowed into the hollow':

I felt hands round a tea mug, dull, blunt,  
 Ringing the white china.  
 How they awaited him, those little deaths!  
 They waited like sweethearts. They excited him.

And we, too, had a relationship—<sup>791</sup>

Lawrence's poem similarly captures the cruelty of the gamekeeper's sexual violence against a feminised rabbit. The gamekeeper begins speaking to what he imagines as the rabbit's desire, which is 'hot' and 'passive' on the one hand, and 'hot, waiting' to pounce, on the other: 'What is the spark | glittering at me on the unutterable darkness | of your eye, bunny?'<sup>792</sup> The poem's concluding stanza captures the gamekeeper's sadistic pleasure, which feeds upon projecting and appropriating the other's sexual desire. The transparency of the man's murderous desire in the poem, however, seems to critique the violent logic and idealising absorption of the rabbit:

I must be reciprocating your vacuous, hideous passion.

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<sup>789</sup> *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, p. 139. Also see Marjorie Perloff, 'The Two Ariels: The (Re)Making of the Sylvia Plath Canon,' in *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodern Lyric* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 186.

<sup>790</sup> *The Theatre of Mourning*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>791</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 193-194.

<sup>792</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 241.

It must be the want in you  
that has drawn this terrible draught of white fire  
up my veins as up a chimney.

It must be you who desire  
this intermingling of the black and monstrous fingers of  
Moloch  
in the blood-jets of your throat.

Come, you shall have your desire,  
since already I am implicated with you  
in your strange lust. <sup>793</sup>

Lawrence's poem is all too easily transposed onto a Plath vs. Hughes relationship. But when criticism equates Hughes with Lawrence, because Plath uses Lawrence's words against a Lawrentian Hughes, there is a simplification which may indeed reinforce our sense of Plath's poetic of mourning, her resignification of Hughes's own Lawrentian phallogocentric discourse, but Lawrence seems to provide a setting for Plath's critique rather than a stand-in for Hughes. In Diane Middlebrook's essay, 'Creative Partnership: Sources for 'The Rabbit Catcher,'<sup>794</sup> she acknowledges the duel between Hughes and Plath as occurring through the ambiguous medium of Lawrence's poetic, but in Middlebrook's account, Lawrence is less of a masculine Other. Just as Plath's 'The Rabbit Catcher' is not simply about Plath's sexual jealousy over Hughes's recently disclosed love-affair, the poetics within her poem are also a tool for 'creativity,' as Lynda Bundzten has argued,<sup>795</sup> while Lawrence, concludes Middlebrook, provides the staging for Plath's performance of the Other as Hughes. While it is certainly true that Lawrence bestows upon Plath tropes and discourse which she must utilise and work through, Lawrence also

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid, pp. 241-242.

<sup>794</sup> Diane Middlebrook, 'Creative Partnership: Sources for 'The Rabbit Catcher,' in Anita Helle's *The Unraveling Archive* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 253.

<sup>795</sup> *The Unraveling Archive*, p. 262.

seems to provide the physical support or a position from which the poetess can speak or refuse.

Middlebrook also highlights the fact that Plath once more quotes Lawrence's 'Rabbit Snared in the Night' within her poem 'Kindness,' in those well-known lines: 'The blood-jet is poetry, | there is no stopping it'.<sup>796</sup> In Lawrence's poem, 'the blood-jet' is the rabbit's throat, a pulsating force which has 'implicated' the 'desire' of the feminine hare and its 'strange lust'. In Plath's 'Kindness,' Lawrence's 'blood-jet' is the female body working in the form of poetry. Tracy Brain also quotes these lines from 'Kindness,' yet Brain additionally quotes the subsequent line, 'You hand me two children, two roses,' in order to argue that there is 'a moment of loving, wondrous contemplation and appreciation' in what would otherwise be Plath's quarrelsome poetic.<sup>797</sup> Though overlooking Lawrence's line in 'Kindness,' Brain implicitly concludes what Middlebrook explicates, that Plath's poetic overcomes Hughes by differentiating Lawrence's poetic from the male Other. The Lawrentian poetics of Plath's 'Kindness' are a form of procreation or creativity, begotten from the female body, while the Father's discourse is the distant Other in the process. In Plath's 'The Rabbit Catcher,' the rabbit's crying throat addresses Hughes, and in Plath's 'Kindness,' the child's voiceless body becomes her own poetics. Perhaps we can see Plath's poetess using Lawrence as a medium, not to attack Lawrence so much as to weaponise Lawrence's form against Hughes's masculine appropriations and Hughes's personification of the sexual violence Lawrence depicted. Lawrence's poetic, in other words, may offer a creative form resistant to phallic language as well, which becomes a maternal or feminine body in Plath, able to confront patriarchal structures and still bear fruit.

A missing link within criticism between Plath and Lawrence's staging of the 'rabbit' and the 'blood-jet' can be found in *Women in Love*. The chapter entitled 'The Rabbit' symbolises Gudrun's reluctant decision to enter into a relationship with Gerald, for Gudrun's trip to the Shortlands estate with Gerald 'was equivalent to accepting Gerald Crich as a lover'.<sup>798</sup> At Shortlands Gerald encounters the family pet, a 'bestly' and 'fearfully strong' rabbit, and he beats it into submission, and yet the rabbit scratches

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid, p. 265.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>798</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 234.

Gerald's skin and remains untamable. At first it is Gudrun who handles the threatening rabbit, initially conveying the uncanniness of her own sexual desire: 'Gudrun thrust in her arm and seized the great, lusty rabbit as it crouched still, she grasped its long ears' in an attempt to control the demonic force. It is Gudrun's combativeness against the demon which sparks Gerald's interest, as Gerald 'saw, with subtle recognition, her sullen passion for cruelty'.<sup>799</sup> The rabbit's lustful uncontrollability expresses an unconscious sexual desire, and yet Gudrun's aggression against the rabbit is also perceived as sexual passion. Gerald's bravado then swoops in to attract Gudrun's unconscious aggressivity with his own, shocking and intriguing Gudrun:

Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up on him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came an unearthly, abhorrent scream of a rabbit in the fear of death. It made one immense writhe, tore his wrists and his sleeves in a final convulsion, all its belly flashed white in a whirlwind of paws, and then he had slung it round and had it under his arm, fast. It cowered and skulked. His face was gleaming with a smile.

'You wouldn't think there was all that force in a rabbit,' he said, looking at Gudrun. And he saw her eyes black as night in her pallid face, she looked almost unearthly. The scream of the rabbit, after the violent tussle, seemed to have torn the veil of her consciousness.<sup>800</sup>

The scene complicates the sexual dynamic between Gerald and Gudrun, as each finds pleasure in dominating a natural, sexual desire as if it were the other's. Yet the reader could ask, does Lawrence simply show that woman desires to be dominated by man, that Gudrun's 'torn' consciousness is a wish to escape and be mastered, or is it Gerald's fantasy to be dominated that spurs the scene? Why is Lawrence overemphasising both the cruelty of human sexual desire and the untamable rabbit, especially after the previous chapter, 'The Industrial Magnate'? The desire to tame the 'extreme force' is shared, as both Gerald

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<sup>799</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid, p. 241.



and Gudrun are attracted to the other's desire to subdue the rabbit, and it is also Gerald's arms and clothes that are cut open in this exchange. The rabbit cannot be forever quieted, as it chaotically runs away once again before wearing itself out. "'It's mad," said Gudrun. "It is most decidedly mad." He laughed. "The question is," he said, "what is madness? I don't suppose it is rabbit-mad"''.<sup>801</sup> It is this rabbit-madness which, in 'Rabbit Snared in the Night,' had provoked the gamekeeper, driving a 'terrible draught of white fire | up my veins,' and so too does Gerald have the rabbit-catcher's 'white fire'. Gerald is described as having 'the power of lightning in his nerves,' and Gudrun 'seemed like a soft recipient of his magical, hideous white fire'.<sup>802</sup> 'White fire,' in both cases, seems to be what the observer of masculine aggression sees and feels, as it is Gudrun's fiery or 'torn' affect that repels and attracts her to the 'white fire' of Gerald's veins, rendering 'the rabbit' merely the physical manifestation of that which separates and pulls the two together. In Plath's 'Kindness,' Lawrence's crying 'rabbit' is likewise employed, but even more to this effect, since Plath replaces it with the 'child'. Plath writes: 'What is so real as the cry of a child? | A rabbit's cry may be wilder | But it has no soul'.<sup>803</sup> By concluding 'Kindness' with 'The blood-jet is poetry, | there is no stopping it. | You hand me two children, two roses,'<sup>804</sup> Plath appeals to a maternal sense which feels that body which resists the Father yet is blood-bound to him, communicating a wounded yet indefatigable desire that is poetry-making.

Lawrence's 'blood-jet' is a trope that can be turned into a poetics of rebirth, as through the maternal body of *Ariel*, or it can be a more internalised poetic of an aching body, as found in her relatively melancholic work like *The Bell Jar* and early poetry in *The Colossus*, for example. Criticism of Plath's post-1960s poetry, or 'great period,' as Perloff called it,<sup>805</sup> tends to posit a lyrical poetic of mourning, but by first distinguishing the opposition between Plath's late poetry and her late prose, a different view of Plath's Lawrentian body can be explored. Plath's poetry from roughly 1959 until her death in '63 is quite diverse, yet Perloff observes a common gesture in her late poetry: 'the same

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<sup>801</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid, p. 242.

<sup>803</sup> Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 83.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid.

<sup>805</sup> Marjorie Perloff, 'On the Road to 'Ariel': The 'Transitional' Poetry of Sylvia Plath,' *The Iowa Review*, 37:4 (Spring 1973), p. 107.

central passion to destroy the old ego and create a new self, to undergo death and rebirth, to enter the lives of animals, plants, or inanimate objects so as to transcend one's humanity'.<sup>806</sup> As manic and fatalistic as Plath's late poetry may appear, it defiantly moves towards a sense of liberation. For example, criticism often points to *Ariel*'s first poem 'Morning Song' and the original final poem of 'Wintering' in order to represent the collection's intended upward swing, from its first word 'love' to its last word 'spring',<sup>807</sup> but Hughes's decision to replace 'Wintering' with 'Words' has conveyed a darker spin and the burdens of language:

Words dry and riderless,  
The indefatigable hoof-taps.  
While  
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars  
Govern a life. <sup>808</sup>

Despite the looming figure of masculinity in *Ariel*, a poetic of re-birth underlines her late poems, where a life is less governed and lives on. Such an afterlife, on the other hand, seems either absent or unimaginable in her late prose work, like *The Bell Jar*. Robin Peel's study of manuscripts for *The Bell Jar* introduces Plath's practice of writing poems on the underside of drafts for *The Bell Jar* (poems often included in *Ariel*).<sup>809</sup> Though the exact date or version of these early drafts for *The Bell Jar* cannot be ascertained, the drafts include a protagonist named Frieda (the name of Lawrence's wife which Plath gave to her first daughter),<sup>810</sup> and the novel's original title was to be 'Diary of a Suicide,' not unlike Dorothy Parker's abandoned title for her own novel, *Sonnets in Suicide*. But while Plath documented Frieda's teenage suicide in prose, Plath was also drafting poems with a midwinter 'narrative of childbirth,' notes Peel, such as 'New Year at Dartmoor' and

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<sup>806</sup> Ibid.

<sup>807</sup> Erica Wagner, *Ariel's Gift: Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath, and the Story of Birthday Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>808</sup> *Ariel*, p. 86.

<sup>809</sup> Robin Peel, 'The Bell Jar' Manuscripts, Two January 1962 Poems, 'Elm,' and 'Ariel'. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 23:3/4 (Summer 2000), pp. 441-454.

<sup>810</sup> *Her Husband*, p. 141.

'Waking in Winter'. These two poems were ultimately drafted into the poem 'Fever' and published in *Ariel* as 'Fever 103°'. The original 'Fever' had worked towards a 'peaceful image of the sleeping baby' and a 'gentle answer to the discord imposed by the outside world. It offers some hope that, if the crisis can be withstood, harmony will prevail,' writes Peel.<sup>811</sup> The pastoral scenes around childbirth and a burning sense of tranquility provide a foundation for *Ariel*, while at the same time Plath was outlining the suicide of young Freida.

The adverse relationship between *The Bell Jar* and *Ariel* is not simply due to a difference in genre, or merely the difference between 'suicide' and 'birth,' but also a difference between a more painful melancholia due to man's dominance and woman's progressive work of mourning. In addition to this distinction, Plath's early poetry also differs from the late *Ariel* in this way, for Plath's early poetry had exhibited the burdens of *The Bell Jar*, while Plath's early prose exhibits the independence of the late *Ariel*. Such thematic reversals, between genres and periods, is important when attempting to generalise Plath's use of any one trope or figure. In *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study*, Luke Ferretter analyses the deathly and victimised female subjectivity of Plath's earliest poetry at Smith and in *The Colossus*, which ran parallel to her early prose. In the early prose, Plath's female characters are able to muster a sense of autonomy, observes Ferretter, rendering Plath's early poetry comparably fatalistic while her early prose was optimistic. Like Peel's archival work on Plath's mirrored drafting, Ferretter studies how *The Bell Jar* was drafted onto the verso of Plath's 1962 poetry, portraying the dialogic writing process which Lynda Bundzten has called Plath's 'back talking'.<sup>812</sup> Plath's double-sided writing process, Ferretter argues, was developed in her final year at Smith, where on the back of her story 'Home is Where the Heart Is' lies the poem 'Terminal,' a poem which dreams of a male eating his bride. Both the short-story and 'Terminal' take place in the kitchen, but Ferretter notices that on 'the two sides of these pages, we can see how, at this period of her creative life, Plath was using fiction to portray women in control of their relationships to men, and poetry to explore the consciousness of women controlled

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<sup>811</sup> *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics*, p. 450.

<sup>812</sup> Luke Ferretter, *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 58.

by men, or at least by their passion for those men'.<sup>813</sup> After continuing to juxtapose Plath's poetry and prose as thematic versos, Ferretter concludes: 'In Plath's work of 1954-55, which she does following her own return from mental hospital, the point at which Esther's story ends, the heroines of her fiction are stronger than the speakers of her poetry. This ceases to be the case as she begins work on *The Bell Jar*'.<sup>814</sup> Suddenly the two generic frames (a subdued poetic and an independent prose) flip in Plath's later years, as *Ariel* appears to support a creative labor of independence while *The Bell Jar* revels in a suffering without closure. Most importantly, the context of such a dichotomous back-talking not only presents *The Bell Jar* as a unique work of poetic prose, but touches upon the divided plane between both sides of a page's polarised text. By focusing on Plath's late prose, an alternative Lawrentian poetic arises that can further broach this bifurcated space in between.

### Plath's Polarisation

When Plath began to discover and explore sexual desire during her Sophomore year at Smith, it was then that she undertook and developed a theory of Lawrence's 'polarisation' from *Women in Love*. In a lengthy journal entry, Plath applies polarisation to the splitting of affect that is experienced in three scenarios: between her desire for professional status and her vulnerable lust for men; between securing a mate while escaping submission; and between a 'mother complex' and 'superiority complex'. More significantly, Plath will describe each individual desire as a physical experience in itself, and thus she will portray the 'duality' of such divergent affects as the torn flesh in between. The journal entry's concluding illustration is quite brutal and poignant, in that polarisation is the swallowing of an oyster, 'rich and potent' but also 'digestively dangerous,' thus she must swallow the oyster with a string attached, in order to yank it back up in the other direction, stressing the uncomfortable and repeated pangs of a flesh's experience of wavering between two desires, as between inside and outside.

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<sup>813</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

Plath's February 25, 1952 entry begins by describing two new 'parts' of her womanhood upon returning to Smith. She has recently obtained the physical sensation of professional success, but also that of a burning lust. The letter opens with a line that relates her sudden academic and literary pursuits as lustful, before the entry then introduces her additional lust for sex. The entry begins: 'Dust lies along the edges of my book, and my lusts and little ideas have gone spurting out in other directions—in sonnets, in stories, and in letters'.<sup>815</sup> Her 'lusts' here seem more like one's excitement or a desire for success, yet her word-choice is telling, for she is directing her sexual energy or desire into writing itself. And yet it is not the practice of writing which is necessarily lustful here, but an object mostly associated with achievement, as in a respected social position. She continues: 'I will still whip myself onward and upward [...] toward Fulbright's, prizes, Europe, publication, males. Tangible, yes, after a fashion, as all weave into my physical experience—going, seeing, doing, thinking, feeling, desiring. With the eyes, the brain, the intestines, the vagina'.<sup>816</sup> This 'tangible' and 'physical experience,' from 'the eyes' to the 'vagina,' includes the grasping of such social symbols as being 'elected Secretary of Honor Board,' working with 'faculty—Dean Randall, et al,' being a 'correspondent to the "Springfield Daily News on Press Board,"' working for the 'Smith Review,' getting honors in her classes, and securing a Summer position at the 'Belmont Hotel'.<sup>817</sup> The lusting after such desires for symbolic positions is then matched by another desire: 'Now comes the physical part—and therein lies the problem. Victimized by sex is the human race. Animals, the fortunate lower beasts, go into heat'.<sup>818</sup> Beasts however have the luxury of mating and '[t]hen they are through with the thing, while we poor lustful humans, caged by mores, chained by circumstance, writhe and agonize with the appalling [sic] and demanding fire licking always at our loins'.<sup>819</sup> While the two desires of social status and proper lust may not seem mutually exclusive, Plath is clear that part of becoming a woman is being 'more realistic' (though she parenthetically mocks 'realistic?'), which means becoming 'more aware of my limitations in a constructive

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<sup>815</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath: 1950-1962* (London: Anchor Books, 2000), p. 103.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

way'.<sup>820</sup> Such limitations refer to the danger thrust upon each 'part' of her 'physical experience,' for a lust for a heterosexual relationship threatens her professional success, and too much success threatens her relationships. Marriage is but one example of a structure waiting to impinge upon her academic career, for example. And yet it is not just the social institution of marriage that looms over Plath's desire for men, but man's general 'superiority complex' and dominance over her identity. Therefore, when Plath begins to describe her experience with the boy she's been seeing, she would first 'feel the inevitable magnetic polar forces in us,' 'body upon body,' yet she could also feel that 'the cycle becomes inevitable' at the same time:

Training, conditioning, make a hunger burn in breasts and secrete fluid in vagina, driving blindly for destruction. What is it but destruction? Some mystic desire to beat to sensual annihilation—to snuff out one's identity on the identity of the other—a mingling and mangling of identities? A death of one? Or both?<sup>821</sup>

These are the first lines in the entry that speak of 'identity'. The three-pages prior to this passage are spent explicating and elaborating upon the feeling of sensational lust when reaching for social symbols and men. Arriving at her thesis here, Plath duly notes that the 'limitation' of either sexual desire is introduced as an inevitable feeling of death. 'Identity' thus emerges as that thing which exists between the sensations of her physical flesh being pulled towards one direction and another. In other words, the sense of 'identity' here seems to hold a certain proximity to two deaths—the loss of her independence and the loss of a sexual relationship. But a third death seems evermore evident, a death which would result from *not* pursuing the limits of *both* lusts. Thus the entry will next propose a most difficult balancing act.

Plath's entry advances by pitching a sort of balance, which is a condition that puts an incredible amount of stress upon a middle ground that must anchor her competing desires and signal the presence of death. After questioning whether a relationship with

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<sup>820</sup> Ibid.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

men (or the boy in question) will be 'A devouring or subordination,' she offers Lawrence's concept of 'polarisation' as a resolution:

No, no. A polarization rather—a balance of two integrities, changing, electrically, one with the other, yet with centers of coolness, like stars. ||  
(And D.H. Lawrence did have something after all—).<sup>822</sup>

The image of 'balance' seems quite harmonious at first, but its maintenance proves onerous. To examine this passage, one should first notice that in imagining a 'balance' between two stars, Plath's entry makes a sudden shift in topic, albeit smoothly, for the journal entry was first concerned with the polarised duality between her two lustful desires (social 'success' and sex), but here the duel-opposition becomes transposed onto the duality of woman's 'identity' and man's identity. This binary relation is based upon a sense and fear for a symbolic function (marriage) and upon a sexual, 'electrical' connection. In the following sentence, Plath writes, 'And there it is: when asked what role I will plan to fill, I say, "What do you mean role? I plan not to step into a part on marrying—but to go on living as an intelligent mature human being, growing and learning as I always have"'.<sup>823</sup> Devising a strategy that allows for a sexual connection but without patriarchal dominance, Plath outlines two different diagrams of twin stars. The first represents the doom of domesticity: 'Never will there be a circle, signifying me and my operations, confined solely to home, other womenfolk, and community service, enclosed in the larger worldly circle of my mate, who brings home from his periphery of contact with the world the tales only of vicarious experience to me'.<sup>824</sup> Plath includes a drawing to illustrate this domestic sphere:



These two overlapping circles represent her absorption into patriarchy, 'confined solely to home'. Plath then pulls back and draws another illustration, this time of two circles barely

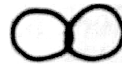
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<sup>822</sup> Ibid.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid.

touching. These slightly 'over-lapping circles' are kept together by a 'riveted center of common ground, but *both* with separate arcs jutting out in the world'.<sup>825</sup> Here she begins to map 'Two stars, polarized,' joined through 'an elasticity of pull, tension, yet firm unity':



The polarity allows for an 'almost' complete communication between the two spheres while attempting to resist any 'fusion,' which 'is an undesirable impossibility—and quite non-durable. So there will be no illusion of that'.<sup>826</sup> What is particularly interesting in these illustrations is Plath's use of physical forces, corporeal sensations and bodily language to form her descriptions and analogies. Since the man's circle is only an imagined identity here, one only felt from her own, these two circles rather depict what Plath describes as her sensation of the Other, comprised of the sexual and anxious pull and push. She proposes to side-step any 'fusion,' 'subordination' or 'dominance' once 'destruction' is felt, and draw near when her lusts pull her in. The two distinct circles are not so much representative of two abstract identities, but rather the thick slice of ink which ties the two circles together in the illustration, upon which the polarity is anchored. The compressed and stretched gap between the two circles thus introduces a fleshly lynchpin, the realm of affect, which must detect, govern and uphold such 'polarisation'. Plath's final example closes in on this point.

Her entry transitions from such general concepts and focuses more closely upon the particular situation between the 'boy' she is seeing and herself, allowing a closer analysis and application of polarisation as a result. Immediately after drawing the circles, Plath claims that her sexual partner will simply consider her wavering polarisation as a political maneuver to reposition herself in the dominant role. 'So he accuses me of "struggling for dominance"? Sorry, wrong number'.<sup>827</sup> The entry then begins to question this young man in a manner not unlike Gudrun's own perception of Gerald, after Gerald took the rabbit from Gudrun and sought to exceed her aggression. Plath continues, '*Why*

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<sup>825</sup> Ibid.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid, p. 106.



is he so afraid of my being strong and assertive? Why has *he* found it necessary to be himself so aggressive and positive in planning and directing actions and events? Could it be because he has a "mother complex"?<sup>828</sup> The young man is seen as having a controlling mother, 'a matriarch in the home,' causing the boy to fear the dominance of women, and yet this 'boy' seems primarily attached to his mother, acting polarised himself between identifying with Father or Mother. Plath admits that she will 'accentuate' this paradigm in order 'to illustrate my argument,' but a reader of Plath can already detect that she is projecting her own situation: a girl constantly writing *Letters Home* for her mother's love and approval while simultaneously trying to escape her controlling mother by obtaining a father-figure.<sup>829</sup> Known for hating her mother at intervals, Plath constantly exhibits a need for mother's love.<sup>830</sup> Such an observation also touches upon a Lawrentian nerve, as Lawrence's work is well-known for its Oedipus complex.<sup>831</sup> Plath continues her analysis of the 'boy': 'He does not seem to be particularly close to or admiring of his father,' yet the boy performs the role of his father in avoiding the mother, concluding: 'Is there not a sort of duality, then, in him—a desire born of childhood, to be "mothered," to be a child, suckling at the breast (a transfer of eroticism from mother to girlfriend)—and yet to *escape* the subtle feminine snare and be free of the insidious feminine domination he has sensed in his home'.<sup>832</sup> It is this need to escape the maternal body and come into a symbolic role that Plath sees as the boy's dueling traits: a 'mother complex' and a 'superiority complex'. But the boy has these two competing traits 'as I do to a certain extent,' writes Plath.<sup>833</sup> This envisioned 'superiority complex' expresses itself in 'condescending and patronizing attitudes,' which Plath describes as the boy's dismissive 'appreciation of art and my writing interests'.<sup>834</sup> She cannot stand his interpretations of poetry and literature, and thus

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<sup>828</sup> Ibid.

<sup>829</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 279. Plath herself, when analysing her own 'melancholia,' acknowledged that her primal need for the maternal had caused her to seek father figures, like Ted, who could replace her deceased father, Otto Plath.

<sup>830</sup> Marianne Egeland, *Claiming Sylvia Plath: The Poet as Exemplary Figure* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 181.

<sup>831</sup> James C. Cowan, *D.H. Lawrence: Self and Sexuality* (Columbus: Ohio State University press, 2002), p. 13. In an unpublished Foreword for *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence wrote, 'The old son-lover was Oedipus,' though Lawrence and scholarship have complicated straight applications.

<sup>832</sup> *Unabridged Journal*, 106.

<sup>833</sup> *Unabridged Journal*, 106.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

she imagines cutting ties with this 'medical man'.<sup>835</sup> It is this exact relationship and context which will appear to be the basis for Esther Greenwood's affair with Buddy Willard in *The Bell Jar* – a medical student Esther meets during college and the novel's primary example of her polarisation. As with Buddy Willard and his mother, or with Esther and hers, the journal entry here posits the desire for a maternal body as that which is against a desire for a sense of symbolisation—to step into the Father's role, to make discursive assertions, to provide structure. Yet it is critical to point out that Plath describes this 'duality' from a framework in which she senses her own desires playing out in her male Other. To conclude, she again reiterates the solution of polarisation by drawing upon another illustration:

To use a favorite metaphor: It is as if both of us, wary of oysters so rich and potent and at once digestively dangerous as they are, should agree to each swallow an oyster (our progressive mate) tied to a string (our reserve about committing ourselves. Then, if either or both of us found the oyster disagreeing with our respective digestive systems, we could yank up the oyster before it was too late, and completely assimilated in all its destructive portent (with marriage). Sure, there might be a little nausea, a little regret, but the poisoning, corrosive, final, destructive, would not have had a chance to set in.<sup>836</sup>

I find this concluding passage and example of 'polarisation' (Plath's 'favorite metaphor') to be quite definitive. The passage continues to fixate upon the 'duality' of two desires, to consume and expel, and their associated deaths, tastelessness and sickness. It is also noteworthy that this journal entry was written fifteen months before Plath's first suicide attempt, and the cursed trajectory of the polarised body seems uncomfortably present. For in *The Bell Jar* Esther describes using a 'cord' to hang herself, but it is the body, not the mind, that decides how to balance her life between two deaths: 'Then I saw that my body had all sorts of little tricks, such as making my hands go limp at the crucial second, which

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<sup>835</sup> Ibid.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid, pp. 107-108.

would save it, time and again, whereas if I had the whole say, I would be dead in a flash'.<sup>837</sup> In relating back to the entire journal entry, Plath is obliged to swallow and fully ingest the objects of her lustful desires, and the symbol for such desire is the oyster's own genital-like imagery. But such a delicious object comes with an anticipated threat before it is even consumed, and so, more painful than the anxiety itself, the oyster is swallowed with a string that ties her digestive (or reproductive) system to an external world, up through her body. The external end of the string then represents her freedom, which can yank up the half-digested oyster whenever, and repeatedly. The critical thread worth highlighting is the constancy of such waging affects and sensation within her body, from craving the oyster, to eating it, digesting it, feeling its sickness, feeling the string that itches throughout, and then a yanking which can never be complete. Her polarisation, in order words, exists in the pleasurable suffering of the flesh that itself remains between two symbolic ends.

Plath's illustration of Lawrence's polarisation is perhaps best observed in the swaying, dialectical form of her journal writing in this entry, pitching one position against another, and woven with bodily language, in metaphor and analogy. Keeping the entry's form and content in mind, a reading of polarisation in *Women in Love* will inform Plath's appropriations. The scene in *Women in Love* wherein Lawrence explains polarisation through Birkin has been a point of contention in Lawrence criticism. The debate is itself symptomatic, as readers interpret Birkin's explicit definition of polarisation as a concrete concept that is also attributable to Lawrence's own thinking. Lawrence had developed a theory of polarisation in his creative non-fiction *Fantasia of the Unconscious* as well,<sup>838</sup> but *Women in Love* is privileged by Plath and provides a form for both the novel and fiction. The two female protagonists in *Women in Love*, Ursula and Gudrun, are each erudite school teachers seeking upward mobility and the unknown experiences which courtship may offer, though they are both quite reluctant to marry. These characteristics may have resonated with Plath, but Plath seems to relate more with the relations between the sisters and their men.

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<sup>837</sup> Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 153.

<sup>838</sup> This is explored in the previous chapter regarding Duncan's microcosm.

Plath's polarisation derives from a passage in *Women in Love* where Birkin tells Ursula that man and woman cannot form a union, a '*égoïsme à deux*,' as Birkin says, but each shall be complete in their own non-relationality, 'like a star balanced with another star'.<sup>839</sup> Plath's sudden commitment in marrying Hughes is taken as a sign that she had found a complimentary star, 'the only man in the world who is my match'.<sup>840</sup> Plath's personal copy of *Women in Love* is 'heavily, heavily underlined,' where Plath highlights passages that describe such sexual polarisation, as when Lawrence writes: 'a new current of passion electric energy, between the two of them, released from the darkest poles of the body and established in perfect circuit [...] from the strange marvelous flanks and thighs, deeper, further in mystery than the phallic source, came the floods of ineffable darkness and ineffable riches'.<sup>841</sup> In an atmosphere of sexual energy, Birkin oddly claims that he requires a non-human relationship with Ursula, where the individual is not absorbed by sexual desire or love, but is somehow animalistic. When Birkin is lying ill in bed, he conjures up a definition of 'polarisation':

In the old age, before sex was, we were mixed, each one a mixture. The process of singling into individuality resulted in the great polarisation of sex. The womanly drew to one side, the manly to the other. But the separation was imperfect even then. And so our world-cycle passes. There is now to come the new day, where we are beings each of us, fulfilled in difference. The man is pure man, the woman pure woman, they are perfectly polarised. But there is no longer any of the horrible merging, mingling, self-abnegation of love. There is only the pure duality of polarisation, each one free from any contamination of the other. In each, the individual is primal, sex is subordinate, but perfectly polarised. Each has a single, separate being, with its own laws. The man has his pure freedom, the woman hers. Each acknowledges the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit. Each admits the different nature of the other.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>839</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 152.

<sup>840</sup> *Her Husband*, p. 42.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid.

<sup>842</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 201.

Plath's use of the term 'mingling' in her own definition of polarisation, and Plath's highlighting of an electric 'circuit,' each allude to this provocative passage. Robert E. Montgomery notes that Lawrence's previous work, *Study of Thomas Hardy*, is 'most optimistic and sanguine, [and] the unity of the opposites was stressed,' but in *Women in Love* 'the oppositeness of the two is stressed';<sup>843</sup> an opposing structure that James C. Cowan had called Lawrence's 'trembling balance'.<sup>844</sup> As in *Fantasia*, Lawrence's polarisation attempts to throw off an absolute idealism, an absorbent love or merging, by interposing bodily conflict as the real sign of difference. Birkin's theory, however, still seems to carry an idealistic balancing of two dialectical poles, just as Birkin seeks to propose a new relation between animalism and spiritualism, the non-human 'demon' and the human, but division and difference is more objectively witnessed in the sharp rebukes of Birkin's interlocutors. Ursula repeatedly refutes and debunks Birkin's theories and impossible propositions, a response that generates and illustrates a relation to Birkin's language that does not fully participate in it, nor do Ursula's responses honour or even understand Birkin's discourse. Colin Clarke has gone so far as to call Lawrence's polarisation a 'river of dissolution' – a losing balance which often corrupts and disintegrates unconscious forces.<sup>845</sup> Yet it is in the form of the novel that the discursive struggles of 'polarisation' can be found.

*Women in Love* does not verbalise a fixed definition of polarisation but uses the novel's literary or dialogic form to work against its very discourse. Although Lawrence is often equated with Birkin (or with Loerke), the novel's counter-arguments and changing dynamics provoke and undermine singular discourses. In the 'Foreword' to *Women in Love*, Lawrence presents the novel as a form of becoming, where the unspokenness of being must struggle into verbal consciousness, thereby introducing the conflict between a suffering affect and the impositions of language as an art form: 'This struggle for verbal consciousness should not be left out in art. It is a very great part of life. *It is not*

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<sup>843</sup> *The Visionary D.H. Lawrence: Beyond Philosophy and Art*, p. 121.

<sup>844</sup> James C. Cowan, *The Trembling Balance* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1990).

<sup>845</sup> Colin Clarke, *River of Dissolution: D.H. Lawrence & English Romanticism* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), p. 5.

*superimposition of a theory. It is the passionate struggle into conscious being*'.<sup>846</sup> Putting the 'struggle' of 'verbal consciousness' front and center, Lawrence is not so much drawing attention to the split negation of language, but to the semiotic drive which is affectively brought into consciousness when coming into a language that refuses it. Since *Women in Love* is considered Lawrence's most dialogic novel, as characters argue philosophically throughout, the struggle of verbalisation uniquely enfolds through what is *not* said between the characters, but by what is expressed in their struggle to do so. As Michael Bell observes, the characters's 'own articulacy now assumes a large part of the narrative burden of the book. And the limits of their articulation comes closer to being the limits of what the book itself can say'.<sup>847</sup>

A form of polarisation begins to take shape from the opening scene, where Gudrun entertains the idea of marriage but denies its ability to give a woman an experience of life. Gudrun's angst, however, is not communicated through her dialogue with Ursula but rather through her interrupted thoughts, her sudden silence, the changes in topic, and her explicit disregard for language, which the novel presents as the issue at hand. The novel opens with Gudrun asking Ursula, 'don't you really want to get married?'<sup>848</sup> Though Gudrun is skeptical, her thinking of marriage as 'possibly undesirable' is still 'bound to be an experience of some sort,' yet Ursula replies, 'More likely to be the end of experience'.<sup>849</sup> Alister Niven has read the former Brangwen women of *The Rainbow* as similarly resisting men while desiring to adopt their social status and language,<sup>850</sup> in order to be, as Lawrence wrote in *The Rainbow*, "[one] of the fighting host".<sup>851</sup> Niven shows that in *Women in Love* this desire takes on a more problematic, if not more artful, form, since 'Lawrence was trying to come to an explanation of something which language [...] may not be able to express,' as 'Birkin asks of knowing Ursula finally

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<sup>846</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D.H. Lawrence: Women in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 486.

<sup>847</sup> Michael Bell, *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 97.

<sup>848</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 7.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> Alister Niven, *D.H. Lawrence: The Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 66.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid.

in a world "where there is no speech".<sup>852</sup> Speechlessness appears as the content and the form of Ursula and Gudrun's discussion of marriage as well. While Ursula entertains the idea of experiencing some thing in marriage, Gudrun shudders at the idea of domestication, where man 'comes home to one every evening,' concluding: 'It's just impossible. The man makes it impossible'.<sup>853</sup> Ursula agrees that marriage is indeed perilous, but Gudrun expresses her predicament with marriage, or the trouble of communicating that very predicament, as a problem of language: 'What is it all but words!'<sup>854</sup> Gudrun switches topics and becomes additionally torn over whether bearing children is an 'experience' or not, yet Gudrun's prolonged silence and repeated breaks cause Ursula to change the topic and ask Gudrun about her feelings towards their father, which Gudrun again refuses to verbalise: 'I haven't thought about him: I've refrained'.<sup>855</sup> Gudrun's initiative to bring up the topic of sexual desire and the idea of marriage is subsequently retracted, and her ostensive repression of both her father and domesticity introduces Gudrun as an independent yet trapped woman who 'in a sense is in a prison house of language and repressed emotion,' writes David Parker, as Gudrun operates in 'a language of repression, of resistance, in other words, designed, like her stockings, to cover up magnificently. And already, the novel is suggesting the price to be paid for this magnificence – thwarted energy, the feeling of everything withering in the bud'.<sup>856</sup> The affectations which Gudrun and Ursula dialogically introduce, in attempting to speak of their desire and fear of men and the paternal, touches upon the polarisation of a feminine body. Addressing the form of polarisation, Bell reads *Women in Love* as a work rising out of Lawrence's own struggle to find an equilibrium during the disorder of World War I, where polarisation is an expressive form acknowledging the failure of language within the affected consciousness of being.<sup>857</sup> For example, within the dialogue between Ursula and Gudrun, Ursula is 'always frightened of words,' as Lawrence wrote, 'because she

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<sup>852</sup> D.H. Lawrence: *The Novels*, p. 97.

<sup>853</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 9.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>856</sup> David Parker, *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 85-86.

<sup>857</sup> D.H. Lawrence: *Language and Being*, p. 97.

knew mere word-force could always make her believe what she did not believe'.<sup>858</sup> Birkin's concept of polarised stars and Ursula's immediate rejection of it, Bell writes, is a gesture that forms the novel itself:

Far from being naturalised as the given structure of their relationship, the image is introduced as a speculative and highly problematic possibility. And this is the note which characteristically pervades the novel as a whole. The novel ends, as well as begins, with an unresolved argument. Not surprisingly, then, this is the novel in which the thematising of language begins to focus on limitation and difficulty.<sup>859</sup>

The novel tends to divide those who would limit their readings to the signified meaning of the novel's language, particularly the pronouncements of Birkin, from those who would focus on the difficulty of entering language as an unfolding form. Like Lawrence, Plath's explicit presentation of polarisation will offer a formative paradigm for reading her writing, especially in regards to the form of her own novel and its allusions to Lawrence's polarised tropes.

In *Women in Love*, Birkin's 'polarisation' requires an impossible demand, where a partner should be demonic and outside of the discourse he himself imposes. Plath's early poetry will also refer back to Birkin's particular 'demonic' language. The ensnaring paradox and incomprehensibility of Birkin's language is conveyed in its loss of signifying power for Ursula. And yet Ursula's maintained relationship to Birkin's alienating discourse speaks more directly to the attraction of her resistance. She listens to Birkin describe how sick he is of living a life of death and wishing for a new life after death, and she becomes aware that while his words fail at signifying any clear meaning, his language is implicating and subduing her, but she cannot withdraw completely:

Ursula listened, half attentive, half avoiding what he said. She seemed to catch the drift of his statements, and then she drew away. She wanted to

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<sup>858</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 437.

<sup>859</sup> *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, pp. 98-99.



hear, but she did not want to be implicated. She was reluctant to yield there, where he wanted her, to yield, as it were, her very identity.<sup>860</sup>

Birkin's words provide a patriarchal model, for his 'demonic' language is meaningless to the women whom he makes such demands of, yet it is the demonic language which demands an animal body from women. Birkin had also required Hermoine to become 'a palpable body of darkness, a demon,'<sup>861</sup> and Ursula becomes confused at such animalistic and dominant desires: 'He says he wants me to accept him non-emotionally, and finally—I really don't know what he means. He says he wants the demon part of himself to be mated—physically—not the human being'.<sup>862</sup> Birkin's quoting of 'WOMAN WAILING FOR HER DEMON LOVER'<sup>863</sup> refers to Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,' but here the demon invokes an impossible pre-requisite for Birkin's concept of polarisation. Plath had herself rehearsed Birkin's demonic language in her relationship with Richard Sassoon, in early poems such as 'On Looking into the Eyes of a Demon Lover,' where 'each lovely lady | who peers inside | takes on the body | of a toad,'<sup>864</sup> and in 'Circus in Three Rings,' where Sassoon is the rabbit trapper on a trapeze, 'my demon of doom tilts on a trapeze, | winged rabbits revolving about his knees'.<sup>865</sup> Plath's 'demon lover' and 'demon of doom' cause the female poet to be eaten or burned in hell,<sup>866</sup> but as Ferretter again argues, in such early prose as 'The Matisse Chapel' (1956), 'she answers back with equal vigor'.<sup>867</sup> The subjects of Plath's early poetry fall victim to Lawrence's demonised male, yet her early prose overcomes it: 'Once again, as Plath creates imaginative works based on the same relationship, that with Sassoon, she writes poems in which her female speakers are overwhelmed by stronger, crueller men, but stories in which the heroines are stronger than those men'.<sup>868</sup> As we will see in *The Bell Jar*, Esther will mimic Ursula's polarised and melancholic body, for Ursula is drawn into the demon's language but only because she

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<sup>860</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 186.

<sup>861</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibid*, p. 532.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>864</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 325.

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid*, p. 322.

<sup>866</sup> *Collected Poems*, pp. 325, 322, 310, 328. See *Sylvia Plath: A Critical Study*, p. 66.

<sup>867</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid*.

can experience her body in resisting it, as 'her blood' is drawn out of such language: '[Ursula] listened, making out what he said. She knew, as well as he knew, that words themselves do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show like any other. And she seemed to feel his gesture through her blood, and she drew back, even though her desire sent her forward'.<sup>869</sup> Ursula's skirmish with Birkin's language becomes polarised when Ursula feels her body's withdrawal from his discourse, which she no longer desires, while, at the same time, she attends to the fire in her blood by reluctantly participating in a discourse that rubs her the wrong way.

There are several points to highlight in this reading of polarisation in *Women in Love*, which can introduce the embedded body in *The Bell Jar*. The first is *Women in Love*'s titular concern for the limits of feminine love and feminine knowledge in regards to a relation to patriarchal structures and discourses. The social and sexual relationships defining the novel encounter not only the problems of sexual difference (perhaps apparent in the undiscussed homosexuality in *Women in Love*), but also the problems in the dialogue which defines such relations. When Ursula's disturbed relationship to language becomes a centre point, a reading of what the body cannot say becomes a struggle for the reader as well. In *The Bell Jar*, the descriptions of Esther's female body are a prominent theme in the novel, yet the body of Esther becomes increasingly pronounced as its relationship to symbolisation becomes more fractious, desexualised, and resistant to entering the language and social roles she still pursues.

### **'Sitting in the Crotch' of *The Bell Jar***

Plath's readings of Lawrence and *Women in Love* resurfaced when she attempted to write in the novel form. Plath would teach Lawrence at Smith College in '57 during her try at the incomplete novel *Falcon Yard*,<sup>870</sup> a progenitor from which the 'specific cultural and intellectual environment' of *The Bell Jar* would emerge.<sup>871</sup> In March of '57, Plath

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<sup>869</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 186.

<sup>870</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 179.

<sup>871</sup> *Writing Back: Sylvia Plath and Cold War Politics*, p. 77.

sought to emulate a 'master' of the novel form, and particular (male) authors came to mind. Lawrence came first, though only *Women in Love* seems fit:

I could write a terrific novel. The tone is the problem. I'd like it to be serious, tragic, yet gay & rich & creative. I need a master, several masters. Lawrence, except in *Women in Love*, is too bare, too journalistic in his style. Henry James too elaborate, too calm & well mannered. Joyce Cary I like. I have that fresh, brazen, colloquial voice. Or J.D. Salinger. But that needs an 'I' speaker, which is so limiting.<sup>872</sup>

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* seemed exemplary, since it had swept U.S. culture in the '50s through its similar first-person narration of an apathetic teenager falling outside normative social roles.<sup>873</sup> And Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* can certainly seem too 'journalistic' or descriptive. *Women in Love*, however, offers Plath a model language, as she does not really want to use an "'I' speaker' like Salinger, since it 'is so limiting,' but she did wish to risk 'confession' in order to make 'sex' 'noble & gut-wrenching' like Lawrence.<sup>874</sup> When drafting in '58, Plath would reread *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, with a tendency to identify with their female protagonists.<sup>875</sup> Drawn in by Lawrence's ability to express the corporeality of both female desire and language, Plath grieves over her dueling inclination: her drive to produce such fleshly language as Lawrence had, while also being dragged down by her fear of doing so, with Mother's eye over her shoulder:

Why aren't I conceited enough to enjoy what I can do and not feel fear?  
Lawrence bodies the world in his words. Hope, careers – writing is too much for me: I don't want a job until I am happy with writing – yet feel desperate to get a job—to fill myself up with some external reality – where

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<sup>872</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 156.

<sup>873</sup> Both Ted Hughes and Majorie Perloff, separately, saw *The Bell Jar* as a contemporary version of 'The Catcher in the Rye'.

<sup>874</sup> *The Journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 156.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid*, p. 196.

people accept phone bills, meal-getting, babies, marriage, as part of the purpose to the universe. A purposeless woman with dreams of grandeur. My one want: to do work I enjoy – must keep clear of any confiding in Mother.<sup>876</sup>

Though Plath placed Virginia Woolf's style on a pedestal beside Lawrence, it was Woolf's impressionistic language and 'neurotic' tone that appealed to Plath, while Lawrence offered a language of sexual passion. In another 1958 entry, Plath continuously tried to achieve a liberating sense in her writing, to render a cosmos out of chaos, but she is constantly wrought with despair as she looks to Woolf and Lawrence:

suddenly all, or most, of that long 35-page chapter which should be – the events at least – the core of my novel seems cheap and easily come by – all the sensational jabber about winds and doors and walls banging away and back. But that was the psychic equivalent of the whole experience: how does Woolf do it? How does Lawrence do it? I come down to learn of these two: Lawrence because of the rich physical passion – fields of force – and the real presence of leaves and earth and beats and weathers, sap-rich, and Woolf because of that almost sexless, neurotic *luminousness* – the catching of objects...<sup>877</sup>

Plath seems to be pulled in two directions, a Lawrentian and a Woolfian, where Lawrence's words are sexually charged while Woolf grasps at objects in an 'almost sexless' form. And yet it is Lawrence who again captures the 'fields of force' in language and between objects of 'sexual passion'. While the *Falcon Yard* had sought to manage and liberate despair, *The Bell Jar* is grown within the dividing styles of a masculine-feminine language and an increasing will to produce writing out of such divisions.

*The Bell Jar* again appears in a particular melancholic form compared to parallel works. Written in six months and completed in August, 1961, the *The Bell Jar* was,

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<sup>876</sup> Ibid, p. 261.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

according to Linda Martin-Wagner, a liberating experience and sudden change for Plath. However, despite the 'cathartic and therapeutic' poems which were written just after *The Bell Jar*, Ferretter argues that the novel offers no clear evidence of emotional change.<sup>878</sup> In a letter to her mother and brother, Plath relates *The Bell Jar* to her poem 'Tulip,' written just a few weeks before *The Bell Jar*, and Ferretter compares and contrasts Esther with the speaker of 'Tulip'. The poet of 'Tulip' folds itself up, a venation among its children, into a beautiful body prepared to die in a movement towards peace,<sup>879</sup> but unlike the eternal beauty of flowery anthesis – the mourning of a dehiscent tulip — *The Bell Jar* envisions a continued angst and deflowering. Esther reflects at the novel's close, 'I wasn't sure at all. How did I know that someday – at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere—the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?'<sup>880</sup> The anxious ending literally leaves death still hanging. The novel was drafted to be about 'Frieda' and Frieda's 'Diary of a Suicide,' a verso of *Ariel's* afterlife, and, not unlike the letters and journals contextualising *The Bell Jar*, Esther is relatively paralysed by choice, desiring to produce writing, obtain social status, and be taken by a man, and yet she returns home after being apathetic at *Mademoiselle* in New York City, fails to register for university courses, rebels against Buddy Willard's intimate letters (but by trying to write back to him), and wishes to 'spend the summer writing a novel,' but she cannot compose sentences. When retreating back to her mother's house from New York, Esther's writing becomes an alternative to her sexual desire, but such de-erotisation cannot speak: she tried, sat up and fed 'the first virgin sheet into my old portable and rolled it up'.<sup>881</sup> Hunched over a fleshly sheet about to be written on, Esther first withdraws to think of five-letter names for her protagonist, like 'Esther,' such as 'Elaine'<sup>882</sup> (but also like Sylvia and Frieda). However, Esther remains caught ruminating on her desires to write and step into a social role; a process portrayed as an unspoiled body, a 'virgin sheet' getting rolled up between a semiotic drive and a reluctance to produce.

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<sup>878</sup> *Sylvia Plath: A Critical Study*, p. 85.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

<sup>880</sup> *The Bell Jar*, p. 230.

<sup>881</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.

Esther's increasing aversion to language is perpetually felt as a physical withdrawal, steadily followed by a need to crawl into a womb-like space of security, the 'cocoon' of her bed, or wrapped in warm towels, or submerged in the tub or a lake, or pressed between mattresses or floorboards. Such curled-up crawl spaces are occupied after Esther feels her desire for either men or social symbols and a sudden deeroticisation from such. For example, like Plath, Esther is interested in poetry, but attracted to writing journalism, and yet she wants to try a novel. The indecision between writing in either genre has Esther 'melting into the shadows like the negative of a person I'd never seen before in my life'.<sup>883</sup> Staring at her options, though kept from committing, Esther sees the world through a bell jar, viewing, through glass, the deep loss that awaits action in the outside world. In seeing loss through the confining glass, Esther also sees the shady figure of her own lack reflecting back at her when peering out beyond it. Such is the relationship Esther builds when looking out at Joan, whom Esther knew before her hospitalisation but whom Esther befriends while they are each treated for suicide. Esther's jealousy for Joan grows, admiring Joan's hospital privileges, Joan's relative independence, and Joan's success with Buddy Willard, rendering Joan an ideal double-threat; but Joan's illness and final suicide make her an uncanny double for Esther's like desire. Esther realises that Joan is but the black sun of her own lacking self: '[Joan's] thoughts were not my thoughts nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seems a wry, black image of my own'.<sup>884</sup> Joan is but one image of an object that appears reflected onto Esther's interior body, the dark surface of flesh, due to the polarisation Joan symbolises for Esther: wanting and not wanting Joan's own desires is an acute sense of Esther's illness. The vantage of Esther's interiorised body-surface distinctly appears when Esther moves back home, to her mother's nest, after becoming manically 'depressed'.<sup>885</sup> Esther cannot sleep but wishes to write, despite her near incapacitation, and when she leans back from her writing her eyelids 'hung raw' with the 'red screen of their tiny vessels in front of me like a wound. I crawled between the mattress and the padded bedstead and let the mattress fall across me like a tombstone. It felt dark and safe under there, but the mattress was not heavy enough. It needed about a

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>884</sup> Ibid, p. 210.

<sup>885</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

ton more weight to make me sleep'.<sup>886</sup> Instead of composing literature, or in the face of writing, Esther desires womb-like structures and composes a space to crawl inside of, finding pleasure in the heavy weight of her own body upon herself to 'make me sleep'. The reader may therefore follow Esther's narration as it first pitches one desire and then its opposition, before retreating into the sanctity of her compressed flesh, which becomes a safe womb for her identity.

Throughout the novel, the symbolic objects which Esther desires continue to appear as 'figs,' whether those objects of desire are vocational positions, marriage, a piece of writing, a man, or even sex. However, these sensuous figs arise from a desire that is subsequently compelled to let those figs rot and fall. The narrator thus remains at the crux of a fig tree, reaching yet refusing to grasp any fig. In a well-known passage, Esther 'imagines herself sitting in a fig tree, unable to decide which fruit to pluck'.<sup>887</sup> For Esther, 'One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor [and] choosing one meant losing all the rest,' but 'above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out'.<sup>888</sup> Though multiple figs begin to crop up, the categories Esther groups them in are far less numerous. While matrimony, domesticity and childbearing seem at odds with Esther's career as a poet or with her casual sex affairs, they each remain symbolic of that which Esther cannot desire in her desiring, and a suffering pleasure grows in the isolated flesh of her resistance, as it did between her mattresses. She does not renounce the fig but remains swaying with her arms half-extended. The infinite figs appear at the end of many branches while Esther is stuck in the 'crotch' of a tree that splits into two. She continues: 'I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig-tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose [...] and as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet'.<sup>889</sup> Rather than merely a product of indecision, the 'crotch' in which Esther stands signifies her fidelity to a body that is affected in its splitting. Her eroticised

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<sup>886</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>887</sup> *Her Husband*, p. 127.

<sup>888</sup> *The Bell Jar*, p. 73.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid.

objects are seemingly met with a suffering pleasure in de-eroticisation, sustaining a torn state of non-relation to her objects of desire.

The context of Plath's fig-tree is comparable to Lawrence's polarisation, if considered in the wider form of each novel. For if the polarisation of *Women in Love* is exhibited in the feminine body's struggle against marriage, motherhood, upward mobility, sexual desire, and discourse, and yet it was the affect of resistance that kept Ursula in a close relation to the above, we may see *The Bell Jar* closing in on how painful Lawrence's polarisation really is. The chamber of such a Lawrentian bell jar seems derivative of *Women in Love* but Esther's figs also stem from Lawrence's 'Figs' and 'Bare Fig-Trees' in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923). Lawrence's fig poems explore the wider politics of sexual difference, as the figs are a democratising emblem, yet they also convey the trapped feminine body. The first poem of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* is the short prose-poem 'Fruits,' which borrows from John Burnett's *Early Greek Philosophy* when prefacing, 'For fruits are all of them female, in them lies the seed'.<sup>890</sup> Marjorie Perloff's *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric* describes Lawrence's fruit poems, specifically 'Pomegranate,' as using a rhetorical voice between an 'I' and a 'you' that is foremost an attempt to solicit a 'worthy antagonist' in the reader. Perloff finds such a dialogic lyric rendering Lawrence a 'performance poet' who marks the 'theatrical edge' in an 'accuracy of feeling' generated from such an antagonism, rather than evoking a romantic object or image in the poem.<sup>891</sup> The poem's dialogic underpinning and provocative affect, continues Perloff, displaces any 'such consistency of symbolism' even though the pomegranate is 'a symbolic of the female fruit'.<sup>892</sup> The fig can symbolise femininity, as its body hides an internal, fleshly synconium lined with seeds and flowers, yet the fig's numerous flowers inside are unisexual; and though often considered a fruit, the fig is itself the scion or infructescence of the tree, a false-fruit. As a fleshly and procreative substance, the fig relates to the underlying body of the tree, and is taken as a false symbol. The politics of Lawrence's 'Bare Fig-Trees' find each fig comprising a singular body to the 'Demos,' with each fig trying to assert itself: 'Each imperiously over-equal to each, equality over-reach- | ing itself | Like the snakes on Medusa's head, | Oh

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<sup>890</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 277.

<sup>891</sup> *Poetic License: Essays on Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric*, p. 103.

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106.



naked fig-tree'.<sup>893</sup> Through the fig, Lawrence critiques both the violent or imperial nature of modern (American) democracy and introduces a sexual politic more aptly explored in 'Figs'.

The poem 'Figs' introduces the fig as female but, as Perloff inferred from 'Pomegranate,' the interior is rather like the 'heart' than the vagina. And yet 'Figs' is concerned with the sexual mystery at the heart of the female fig, which seems predisposed to one of two deaths, whether from being neglected by man or eaten by it. Initially the poem introduces the fig as male, but the poem then argues that the fig is an object signifying both the ripening and the caged dying of a woman's sexual body. Like 'Rabbit Snared in the Night,' 'Figs' expresses the male's sexual violence and society's violent treatment of the female fig. The poem begins:

The proper way to eat a fig, in society,  
Is to split it in four, holding it by the stump,  
And open it, so that it is a glittering, rosy, moist, honied, heavy-  
petalled four-petalled flower.<sup>894</sup>

Ken Russell's 1969 film *Women in Love* would later quote from 'Figs' to allude to the poem's imagery of oral sex and the opportunities for female sexual desire. The film also quotes the poem's more 'vulgar' treatment of the fig, which introduces the poem's primary impasse:

Then you throw away the skin  
Which is just like a four-sepalled calyx,  
After you have taken off the blossom with your lips.

But the vulgar way  
Is just to put your mouth to the crack, and take out the flesh  
in one bite.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> *Complete Poems*, p. 300.

<sup>894</sup> *Ibid*, p. 282.

The fig is not 'symbolic' or 'male,' writes Lawrence, but 'it is female,' and 'a very secretive fruit,' because it is the body: 'Involved, | Inturned, | The flowering all inward and womb-filled; And but one orifice'.<sup>896</sup> The poem continues to develop images of what is 'always a secret,' of what is withheld inside the *heart* of the vagina, its 'milky-sapped, sap,' 'Its nakedness all within-walls, its flowering forever unseen,' secrets only revealed if the 'wound' is split. However, if the wound is split, it bleeds and dies:

In the inwardness of your you, that eye will never see  
Till it's finished, and you're over-ripe, and you burst to give  
up your ghost.

Till the drop of ripeness exudes,  
And the year is over.

And then the fig has kept her secret long enough.  
So it explodes, and you see through the fissure the scarlet.  
And the fig is finished, the year is over.

That's how the fig dies, showing her crimson through the  
purple slit  
Like a wound, the exposure of her secret, on the open day.  
Like a prostitute, the bursten fig, making a show of her secret.

That's how women die too. <sup>897</sup>

The poem puts forward a dilemma, since the unknown fig will rot on the branch if it is not allowed to open, which is what it desires, yet if the fig has the rare chance to release its contents orgasmically, then it may fall into the death of 'self-affirmation': '*Let us burst*

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<sup>895</sup> Ibid.

<sup>896</sup> Ibid.

<sup>897</sup> Ibid, p. 283.

into affirmation,' says the female body of 'Figs.' The poem closes by questioning what ghostly secret lies between the female body's two deaths: 'What then, when women the world over have all bursten into | self-assertion? | And bursten figs won't keep?'<sup>898</sup> The line, 'That's how women die too,' not only likens women to the fig, but again alludes to the emotional 'heart' as also the mysterious organ which the poet hopes to feel and climb into. For Lawrence, the sexual mystery at heart is also trimmed from its libidinal connotations, becoming a suffering mystery rooted in the heart, which cannot be known, touched, or made available. The poem at first seems adverse to the Lawrence of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, as a Puritanical tone still looms with a concern over the morbidity of the womb and its best-kept secret. Again we may see a duality of two deaths working that is particularly Lawrentian in its focus upon the fleshly substance working in the middle. It is also a melancholic womb, a cell that comes through in *The Bell Jar*, but not so much through tropes as in form.

In fact, Esther provides her own reading of a fig-tree at the beginning of the novel, which constructs a framework for what lies ahead in the novel. Bedridden after getting food-poisoning during her NYC internship, and at the onset of her 'depression,' Esther 'reached for the book' that *Ladies' Day* had sent. She 'flipped through one story after another until finally I came to a story about a fig-tree'.<sup>899</sup> It is a subtle, sad story which will provoke Esther's sense of sexual desire and romance, but the reading results in Esther casting the story aside and crawling in between the lines of the text, as if it were her bed sheets. The story is of a 'Jewish man' who lived next to a convent, where a 'dark nun kept meeting' him 'at the tree to pick the ripe figs,' that is until one day 'they touched the backs of their hands together'.<sup>900</sup> Their physical contact aroused and acknowledged the unspoken desire behind their ritual, and the nun never returned. In her place, 'a mean-faced Catholic kitchen-maid came to pick them instead and counted up the figs the man picked after they were both through to be sure he hadn't picked any more than she had, and the man was furious'.<sup>901</sup> The story encourages Esther to think of her own relationship with Buddy Willard, 'We had met together under our own imaginary fig-tree, and what

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<sup>898</sup> Ibid, p. 284.

<sup>899</sup> *The Bell Jar*, p. 51.

<sup>900</sup> Ibid.

<sup>901</sup> Ibid, pp. 51-52.

we had seen wasn't a bird coming out of an egg but a baby coming out of a woman, and then something awful happened and we went our separate ways'.<sup>902</sup> Sexual desire had become tangible, and thus threatening, and so she departs. Esther liked the story, but it represents the patriarchal structure under which both the 'Jewish man' and the 'dark nun' had been confined. Despite their religions, sexual desire surfaces as the unspoken crisis of the short-story, as the two meet under the ripening figs. The 'dark nun,' like Esther, recoiled from the dangers such pleasure brings and returned to the solitary, enclosed walls of the convent. The man remains, checked by a more chaste nun, and the former nun disappears. After reaching the 'last page' of the story Esther 'felt sorry,' and 'I wanted to crawl in between those black lines of print the way you crawl through a fence, and go to sleep under that beautiful big green fig-tree'.<sup>903</sup> Esther's sudden rush of interest in the story, in contrast with her presiding gloom, speaks to her identification with the text, but her identification with what exactly? The scene and its language are indications of the novel's foreseen gestures, for after the novel introduces the opposing dynamics in the story, under the fig tree, Esther is inclined to crawl in between the written lines and fall asleep in the womb-like heart, buried and rolled up, instead of becoming excited over the story's language or meaning. Esther's reading introduces a hermeneutic for reading the bodily form of the novel.

A pattern throughout *The Bell Jar* ensues, where a body gestures towards wrapping itself up tightly, insulating itself from the desires weighing upon the protagonist. One of the early rehearsals is when Esther reflects upon Buddy Willard and his mother. Mrs. Willard has pushed Esther and Buddy's relationship towards marriage, and Mrs. Willard has also set Esther up with a professional contact, Constantin, an older interpreter from the UN. These are two figs. But, when staring into a mirror, Esther becomes repulsed when entertaining either of the two opportunities, and she subsequently sees her face 'like the reflection in a ball of dentist's mercury',<sup>904</sup> darkened, stretched and glossed over. When fancying the sexual and professional objects of Buddy and Constantin, Esther immediately recognises her distorted, darkened reflection, then suddenly 'thought of crawling in between the bed sheets and trying to sleep, but that

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<sup>902</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>903</sup> Ibid.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

appealed to me about as much as stuffing a dirty, scrawled-over letter into a fresh, clean envelope,' so she 'decided to take a bath'.<sup>905</sup> This early scene already witnesses Esther's need to crawl into envelopes or spaces in between the letter, but here, Esther (the 'scrawled-over letter') feels too 'dirty' to be folded up cleanly, and instead she begins to regress into the safety of the bath's hot fluids. 'Whenever I'm sad I'm going to die, or so nervous I can't sleep, or in love with somebody I won't be seeing for a week, I slump down just so far and then I say: "I'll go take a hot bath"'.<sup>906</sup> There, in the warm placenta, Esther can 'meditate' inside water 'so hot you can barely stand putting your foot in,' but 'you lower yourself, inch by inch, till the water's up to your neck [...] I never feel so much myself as when I'm in a hot bath'.<sup>907</sup> The bath allows Esther to feel her warm flesh submerged around her, and once she regresses back into the body of the womb, as if in that space between pages or text, where she can finally feel at home. Whether in the bath or in bed, or in the burrowed crotch of the fig tree or in the heart of the womb, Esther senses a burning body in which she hopes to remain: 'The longer I lay there in the clear hot water the purer I felt'.<sup>908</sup> When Esther finally gets out of the bath, she wraps herself in 'bath towels' like a 'new baby',<sup>909</sup> and heads straight to a bed that again provides a practical return: 'I woke warm and placid in my white cocoon'.<sup>910</sup> The depressing act of isolating oneself in bed, or in the bath, does not alone capture the logic and affective forces which bring her there, but in first mapping the polarising dynamics that introduce Esther's bodily ego as a dark, internalised surface-image, Esther's wound can be more directly felt, attended to and held.

Esther's reaction to Dodo Conway is an acute example of how quickly the polarised body emerges. When Esther sees Dodo Conway, the Catholic wife and mother of six, Esther 'crawled back into bed and pulled the sheet over,' but 'even that didn't shut out the light, so I buried my head under the darkness of the pillow and pretended it was night. I couldn't see the point of getting up'.<sup>911</sup> The image of Dodo represents Esther's

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid, pp. 18-19.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

<sup>910</sup> Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

need and desire to pursue a sexual relationship, marriage, and motherhood, like Ursula and Gudrun, but since Dodo so intensely embodies the patriarchal structures and crises which Esther intends to escape, she leaps from psychically balancing these antagonising forces and enfold into a dark, insular body. Often reflecting upon her repetitious nature of conjuring up a fig just to cut it down, Esther admits, 'The trouble was, I hated the idea of serving men in any way. I wanted to dictate my own thrilling letters'.<sup>912</sup> When on a date with the UN interpreter, 'another fig,' Esther knows that 'as soon as he came to love me I would find fault after fault, the way I did with Buddy Willard and the boys after him. The same thing happened over and over'.<sup>913</sup> Being married and domesticated was like being a 'slave' within 'some private, totalitarian state',<sup>914</sup> and yet Esther kept desiring it. Esther's decisions of either giving into a slave-state or taking up her letters are each paths towards a condition that her body's pleasure in suffering cannot fully allow.

As Esther's regression into an insulated body culminates, so too does the problem of language itself become increasingly problematic. It is not long before Esther's ongoing attempts at writing produce only interrupted, slowed and meaningless scribbles. When Esther tried to write a 'novel' at her mother's, but instead crawled in between the mattresses, it was inside this pocket of darkness and compressed body that Esther once again tried to read. She flips open to a passage in *Finnegan's Wake* where Joyce returns to the primal Thing between Adam and Eve, as conveyed through a disrupted semiotic drive. Reading, 'riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay,' Esther's 'eyes sank through an alphabet soup of letters to the long word in the middle of the page': 'bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronnrueonnnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooohordenenthurnuk!'.<sup>915</sup> Unable to verbalise the word, a word that now rather 'sounds like a heavy wooden object falling downstairs,' Esther simply lets the pages 'fan slowly by my eyes,' using the invisible but physical air between the pages to blow upon her skin.<sup>916</sup> 'Words,' Esther continues, are 'dimly familiar, but twisted all awry, like faces in a funhouse mirror, fled past, leaving no impression on the glassy surface of

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<sup>912</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>914</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>915</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>916</sup> Ibid.

my brain'.<sup>917</sup> Physically stuffed inside a box, and transcendently inside a jar, Esther becomes manically drawn to linguistic exaltation yet keeps to the affected surface of her body, which cannot produce proper discourse. Soon after, Esther intended to write a letter to Doreen, but quickly realised that 'when I took up my pen, my hand made big, jerky letters like those of a child, and the lines sloped down the page from left to right almost diagonally, as if they were loops of string lying on the paper, and someone had come along and blown them askew'.<sup>918</sup> Esther's waxing difficulty in reading or writing coincides with her inability to fully grasp her objects of desire in society as well. Here the very letter is slowed and made meaningless by a body that signals its pleasure through resisting the letter's representation yet colludes with the letter's semiotic demands for more letters and their meaning.

This reading of *The Bell Jar* is not unlike wider criticism of the novel, in that it is particularly interested in depictions of the female body, yet a reading of Lawrence's polarisation can further tease out not only the novel's bodily subjection, but also the bodily space operating as novelistic form itself. This reading of *The Bell Jar* was also introduced as holding a certain correlation to Plath's poetry at that time. In legitimating the often theatrical and lyrical work of mourning in Plath's late poetry, which works through Lawrence's discourse, a verso plane of writing, which is more melancholic, arises in Plath's late prose. This parallel, between Plath's poetry and prose, was contextualised in order to frame a space between the two sides of the page, in the hopes of locating a bodily space for the subject. In *The Bell Jar*, that subject is uniquely given a body that cannot speak but which crawls into language and struggles against it to find its form. When mapping onto Plath a reading of Lawrence's 'polarisation,' as found in *Women in Love*, a bodily form of writing that may not seem particularly liberating, yet its politics and modes of resistance appear quite physical and literal. The position of Ursula or the condition of Lawrence's fig are ostensibly bleak, since life is presented as a pleasure in one's suffering towards a desire that cannot be symbolised, and a form of resistance that holds onto itself.

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<sup>917</sup> Ibid, pp. 119-120.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

## Conclusion

The three frames defining this dissertation, as outlined in the 'Introduction,' were listed in an order that ostensibly structures each chapter, but they are increasingly difficult to distinguish one from one another. First, if nothing else, this project finds significance in at least presenting the notion that Lawrence was a critical figure for Olson, Duncan and Plath, a fact surprisingly missing in the vast majority of criticism. And if a sense of Lawrence's general importance can come through in these chapters, then further work may perhaps be done in this area. Second, in regards to the topic of the body, if a connection can be drawn between Lawrence and the American poets, then an inviting doorway has been opened for criticism. But to read Lawrence's form of writing is to confront a practice of righting the body, as Poplawski introduced, where not just the content is preoccupied with the body but where the manner in which it was written and the style in which it is read are meant to act as a body may. And finally, if post-1945 American poetry criticism has long respected the centrality of Olson's proprioception, Duncan's queer form, and Plath's feminine subjectivation, then it is difficult to parcel these bodily poetics from a Lawrence who comes bearing a distinct form.

Pains have been taken not just to contextualise the individual poetics of Olson, Duncan and Plath, but to situate each poet within a larger Lawrentian coterie. I made this effort to convey the wider histories and areas of study available for criticism, or the potential grounds upon which this project may rest. Olson was selected to begin this dissertation for his foundational role in post-1945 American poetry, a role most simply obtained from his manifesto 'Projective Verse'. The Black Mountain School, which includes Duncan, Creeley and often Denise Levertov (although Levertov never attended the College), is also highlighted as being a distinct tradition coming out of Lawrence, which Duncan made explicit on several occasions. Duncan himself is a unique poet who hinges upon the Black Mountain School and swung through a number of Lawrentian camps: from his high school years under Keough, in New York City, at *The Phoenix*, in Berkeley, at Black Mountain, then later in the '60s (with Levertov particularly). During each of these poetic phases Duncan collaborated with other poets through a Lawrentian



poetic, in one way or another, which offers many different histories to be explored, though not necessarily here. Plath also offers a similar vantage, as she is tied to American poets, like the so-called Confessional Poets, though this was not explored. Her agonistic relationship with Ted Hughes's own Lawrentian poetic was critical for my chapter, and it is a factor which general criticism finds nearly impossible to overlook, while Plath's own private and life-long passion for Lawrence is usually disregarded or undermined. In choosing these three poets, in this order and in these contexts, I sought to imply much: that Lawrence's resistance towards and within sexual and identity politics, body politics, or bodily poetics, whether in prose or poetry, offered a critical perspective, alternative, or at least a provocation for varying forms of resistance arising in post-1945 American poetry.

This project took up the body as a form in which a notion of resistance could appear. Perhaps this is generally an unavoidable topic, taken up more directly or indirectly at times; but today a retheorisation of the body as material substance of resistance is still quite in fashion, and my project certainly seeks to wedge its way into the debate to have its say. For starters, by announcing the term 'resistance' in my title, I am perhaps granting an optimism to this wave of poetry which does not exist in certain fields, or is not exactly evident, nor should it be. At times I rely on Lacan and Merleau-Ponty to touch upon a number of traits which help work with 'resistance'. One notion is that resistance is a process, and not a singular event. To spot 'resistance,' it would need to be non-apparent at some point beforehand, and thus resistance falls into a series of appearing and non-appearing events, even if seemingly fluid. Interruptions are hints or traces of something working. And while conventional politics or literature may have us believe that symbolic action, protest, violence and language are 'resistance,' for Lacan and Merleau-Ponty the resistance appears in the signs only as they are disrupted from their continuity, and thus the breach, the void, the hole, or, in either case, the space between becomes critical if not vital.

But this way of reading is itself the resistant process, which I believe to be the point. For starters, there is an unwillingness to label the poets herein as representing any defined tradition of politics, unless the undefined becomes a tradition. Lawrence is a model figure in this regard, which is cherished when interpreting his *Apocalypse* and

*microcosm*. But of course this comes through differently when Olson begins to rant about Marxism, Communism, Hegelianism, and Fascism to introduce Lawrence as 'THE MAN WHO SAW'. And I appreciate Duncan's participation with radical colonies and groups, groups who try to associate with a form of politic but Duncan's particular politic seems to continually morph and slip through the already patchy nets of his political environs. Plath too became a strong opponent to Cold War politics, but while appearing feminist, her changing poetics continue to scratch at a malleable surface which bleeds before subscribing to any establishment. Through Lawrence, however, the political poetics here are nevertheless made slightly more tangible under the aegis of a body or implicit body-politic.

It is this wider politic that, while not being taken up directly, is present in the resistant bodily space which I find in the text. For unlike a body with assertive positivity and symbolic language, each of the poetics introduced herein shows a bodily form working within the space of the page and disrupting the text's progression and structure. While sudden interruptions may seem violent, disruption comes in the form of an appearance of physical space, which appears active but quite non-violent. Unlike the passivity heretofore considered to be the 'Void' of Olson's 'Space,' I introduce a space that is a sensible and physical force, but which suspends violence. Duncan's textual dehiscence, his passive microcosm, and the interlocking grasp of space in 'The Torso,' each resist structuration with a bold body of passive action or even a gripping compassion. It is in such a context that I find Plath's body to be incredibly resistant, which is why one may come to sense, through reading, an affected flesh in her text. As melancholic as my reading of Plath here may appear, it is most comparable to Olson and Duncan in that her later work is situating a bodily form as that which is in between the bodies represented by desire, fear or language. But of course I cannot over stress how such historical, biographical and theoretical contexts are ultimately felt or seen as working primarily upon the surface of the text, upon the page, in the book which the reader holds and enters.

The open forms of post-1945 American poetry are an interesting ground to explore such resistance in. Often parallel to contemporaneous theories of structuralism, and often anticipating and running beside formative theories of post-structuralism, new

American poetry confronts many of the impossibilities of resistance, particularly through language, and yet they dashingly appear quite resistant. It is not necessarily in their words as much as in their form that a window is offered which poststructuralism cannot completely climb into. By speaking through the space on the page, for example, we are also given a hole to climb through, to see if resistance can be thought there, in the flesh. Another title for this dissertation could perhaps have been 'Gripping the Resistance of Bodily Form,' as the reader is, at the close of each chapter, ultimately stepping back into a way of handling the text. Olson, Duncan and Plath each pushed me towards this vantage.

It is Olson's use of 'space' that has defined much of his tradition, and yet his use of 'space' has been read negatively, where 'space' is stripped of its sensible body while the ink runs dry. Carla Billiterri's *The American Cratylism* is perhaps indicative of an inclination in Olson scholarship, in that the positive attributes of Olson's writing are his obsessive historicisation of language and its American place, at least as presented in Billiterri, but such a reading negates or avoids the work which the space is doing on the page, as it unfolds. After reading Billiterri, one has to ask, if language is so perfect in and of itself, why is the page's space chopping it to bits? Billiterri's work is absolutely critical when 'space' is accounted for as concretely, though not as a concept. Olson's work on ideograms and hieroglyphs can inform this aesthetic of space rather than just his discourse. There is a similar form working in Duncan's historiography of Eden, where in his late poetry, like 'The Torso,' a 'hieroglyphic' spacing interlocks and embodies a queer form of touch. Previous readings of 'The Torso,' which are mostly concerned with its same-sex content, routinely neglect the aesthetic form of the poem and the body of its space. Known as one of Duncan's most politically resistant poems, the resistances of bodily form appear inseparable from the materiality of space upon the page. These two poets can introduce and legitimise a bodily form of space which is then teased out in the poetic prose of Plath. Though *The Bell Jar* explicates a mode of being wherein the subject repeatedly tries to crawl within the space between written lines, this way of reading the *The Bell Jar* itself has been missed; where perhaps we could say that 'Plath' is not haunting the text beneath it or in it, but is pressing herself against its written characters. Perhaps evermore interesting is the relationship between philosophy or literary theory and the means by which such poetics resist even such logics. The silent but

tangible space here may not speak volumes, but it persists. Let me also note that the readings sketched out in this dissertation may not be universally applicable, as these poets are not 'Language' poets, for example, but time will tell.

The Olson chapter took the longest to introduce in my 'Introduction,' and in the dissertation, and this is due to Olson being an establishment unto himself, which takes great force to move. Not only is the chapter introducing a Lawrencean history throughout Olson's formative years, but, as a result of such, I was forced to reinterpret or reintroduce many of his formative works. The Olson chapter delineates three consecutive phases in Olson's poetic, which has been normally reduced to one poetic in Olson criticism – 'Projective Verse'. But by first mapping how the 'prospective' was central to Olson from 1944 to 1950, through Lawrence, the term could then be seen to fall from Olson's usage as other terms arrived (such as projective, post-modern, and conjectural), thus tracking changes in Olson's perspective and his poetic form. Since Olson continues to keep Lawrence as the paragon of such terms, through 1952, a sensual body of space remains and becomes further grounded. Whether I have clearly argued for what Lawrence offers Olson or not, I have hoped to complicate our sense of Olson's poetic development by opening up these stages, which Lawrence, and perhaps other figures, can piece together for the critic, as they did for Olson. With Olson's fidelity to Lawrence's attention to sensuality and to physical space, it was opportune for pushing the topography in Olson's poetry, where a sensible space is both the topic of the poem and the illustrated form. The poems read here are exemplary in this regard, as not all Olson's poems are doing likewise, and it is Olson's writing on Lawrence which led me to the corresponding poems. In concluding with the epigraph from *Ishmael* (1947), the poem 'The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing' (1949), and 'To Gerhardt, There, Among Europe's Things of Which He Has Written US in His "Brief an Creeley und Olson"' (1952), Olson's readings of Lawrence's sensible space may contextualise that work and in-form how a bodily form of space is presented to the reader. This hopefully alters phallic readings of Olson's language. Again, it may or may not be ironic that Lawrence helps do so.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, structuralism and language helped to frame each section on Olson, providing a theory of body-intentionality and motility for Olson's form as a narrative of space. In addition, applying Merleau-Ponty brings up the topic of

sexual difference as well, and the potentials within that chiasm. Feminist interpretations of Merleau-Ponty were briefly introduced, and such nuances provide a stepping stone for the Duncan chapter that follows, where feminist and queer readings of Merleau-Ponty rise again in a queer Lawrentian poetic. However, the stepping stone of Olson's Lawrentianism also provides a literal aestheticisation of the body of space, where fleshly language is itself saturated and formed by the space upon the page. Merleau-Ponty saw in Matisse a way of perceiving and painting upon a canvas, while I see Olson's poet-as-object upon the page, where the space is. And here the viewer would be a reader, and not the absent artist. In granting Olson's poetic a sensible body of space, in poems such as 'an Olson,' the reader is presented with a form of poetry that is sailing and floating in a space, which the reader holds onto. Not only does this open various doors for reading Olson, but I believe it pushes a literary theory of Merleau-Ponty.

My last reading of Duncan builds upon the Olson chapter quite directly. And in this regard 'The Torso' is a unique poem, as it harbours many of the traits defined throughout my chapter on Duncan. 'The Torso' combines four main components that are also undeveloped in Duncan criticism: an Edenic relationality; an Edenic touch; the bodily form of space; and Lawrence's hand in such. 'The Torso' introduces itself as a 'hieroglyphic' form, and as the shape of the poem bends and follows the male body downward, the poem concludes in a bodily form as the language and space interlock, as if the feminine space is grasping the language of the poet's male-Other. But here I argue that the feminine space is the Eve-like bosom of the poet, the material loam of the poem, upon which the Other speaks and rests. The psychoanalytic lens through which the poet works in this poem is carried by a spatial and bodily form that also invokes Merleau-Ponty, and I draw much from Butler's criticism on sexual difference within Irigaray's own writing on Merleau-Ponty. This is not the same reading as in Olson, as Duncan's form of protest is to storm the gates of Paradise and occupy Eden in a queer Lawrentian form. And while Olson sought to usurp the history of Western violence through a bodily form of space, Duncan's queer form of undying sought to do likewise. Duncan's life-long questioning and exploration of gender performance and a poetics of sexual difference is a testing ground for future queer theorists in the form he provides.

The opening section on Duncan primarily focused on how Duncan's Lawrentian poetic of sexual difference is a resurrecting poetic for a queer identity, but Duncan's non-teleological movement is a resistant and disruptive one, exhibited in the 'wounds' of both Lawrence's *The Man Who Died* (which Duncan privileged during his early years) and Duncan's earliest poetry. Since Judith Butler established the critical role of sexual difference, as a limit and a possibility, in both the linguistic performances of psychical life and in attributing such language within the space of Merleau-Ponty's chiasm, Butler is referenced when introducing Duncan's 'fairy tale,' which is increasingly given a bodily form throughout the chapter – in the fleshly microcosm of *Heavenly City, Earthly City* and in Edenic touch in 'The Torso'. The objective here, for the opening of the Duncan chapter, is to introduce Duncan's 'fairy tale' as a dialectical movement and rhetorical narrative where the deconstruction of gender is a form of identity-making, which for Duncan and Lawrence was also an ongoing resurrecting apocalypticism. If Lawrence can be seen as the literary model for such a movement, as Duncan explains, then a Lawrentian fairy tale can then be applied throughout the chapter, along with its queer interruptions. In this first section, on Duncan's early collection, *The Years As Catches*, I draw out theories of textual and narrative 'dehiscence,' and invoke queer literary theorists of the past decades, like Edelman, and such theories adapt as the chapter matures with Duncan. What was also painstaking in this chapter, was that no existing criticism seems to have read Duncan's early poetry (1938-1941) as a serial movement and development, nor is there existing criticism which provides a close-reading of *Heavenly City, Earthly City* – of the serial collection or its titular poem. There is much work to be done in the above areas.

The Plath chapter takes an interesting turn. After toying with Olson's masculinity and Duncan's homosexuality, the feminine in Plath is given a different body through Lawrence as well. It should first be noted that I recognise that *The Bell Jar* is a prose piece, and not 'poetry,' as the dissertation's title would have it. However, not only do I introduce the poetics of prose in *Call Me Ishmael*, and throughout Lawrence's prose, but I introduce *The Bell Jar* by relating it to Plath's early-poetry and contrasting it with her late-poetry, which may render Plath's only novel, *The Bell Jar*, as a relevant form of poetic prose. As with the Olson and Duncan chapter, Plath's many references to

Lawrence appear difficult to piece together, but Plath's journal entry on Lawrence's polarisation stood out as a possible spinal cord for other references. Plath's journal is quite a rich text, and her entry on Lawrence's polarisation not only appears as an ostensive awakening for Plath's literary studies but also as her realisation of her sexual and sensual body, and its own desires. Though she only mentions Lawrence's name once in the entry, her drawn out elaboration of polarisation, as acting on all facets of her life, is clearly a rereading of Lawrence. Two significant and additional areas of Plath's readings of Lawrence can latch on to such an entry: Plath's continued privileging of *Women in Love*, from which polarisation is found and formed, and the various references to Lawrence in *The Bell Jar*, such as his figs, which illustrate an interesting comparison to Lawrence's polarisation of the female body as well. Abounding notes on Lawrence turn up in Plath, but with these connections sewn, a patchwork can be laid for reading the novel. What is evident in the various uses of polarisation is that the body's suffering pleasure against symbolisation is a melancholic polarity of resistance. More importantly for this chapter, the body is not absent but granted a material space. Future studies can unearth whether or not the short-story which Esther reads in bed, of the old nun and rabbi, was a story Plath actually read or made up; but the fig-tree there, and Esther's crawling in between the lines of the story, precisely introduce a gesture I find rehearsed throughout the novel. It is a beautifully melancholic reading, done by Esther, written by Plath, but clearly giving the reader a way of reading Plath herself. Repeatedly Esther slides in between her writing, as between the mattresses or the crotch of the fig-tree, and here we find the body of space again. All in all, by following Lawrence once again through Plath's writings, a particular bodily form emerges, in a unique but material form of space, perhaps drawn by the reader who holds it.

Post-1945 or post-WWII American poets present a critical shift in form, thus generating new ways of reading. Though Lawrence is but one of many entry points or alternative traditions from which to approach new American poets, he nevertheless provides a unique frame for retracing a transatlantic history and certain poetic arising in the counter-cultural movement. Above all, I find Lawrence provocative, as many generations have, and those theorists and authors who made use of his provocations by negatively criticising him, in order to pin down their own radical thought, reflect those

who have embraced him to do likewise. Instead of either privileging Lawrence outright, or stereotyping him too harshly, this dissertation has sought to make use of his spurring texts in order to stir up historical certainties, discursive positivity, and theoretical concepts, to hand over a different sense of reading.



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